

Open Research Online

The Open University's repository of research publications and other research outputs

The nature of the relationships between the child, their parents and teachers within a primary school, working together to meet the needs of children defined as having “special educational needs”

Thesis

How to cite:

James, Anthony William (2000). The nature of the relationships between the child, their parents and teachers within a primary school, working together to meet the needs of children defined as having “special educational needs”. EdD thesis The Open University.

For guidance on citations see [FAQs](#).

© 2000 The Author

Version: Version of Record

Copyright and Moral Rights for the articles on this site are retained by the individual authors and/or other copyright owners. For more information on Open Research Online's data [policy](#) on reuse of materials please consult the policies page.

oro.open.ac.uk

Name: Anthony William James.

Personal identifier: M7125275.

**The nature of the relationships
between the child, their parents and
teachers within a primary school,
working together to meet the needs
of children defined as having
“special educational needs”.**

Doctor of Education (EdD.).

Submitted: September 2000.

Abstract

This dissertation is about how to help ensure that children considered to have special needs within the primary school context are enabled to overcome the difficulties they are facing. The premise of this dissertation is that this is most effectively achieved when the child, her teacher and her parents have a genuine role within the decision-making process concerning how to meet such needs. The functioning of the two key relationships in addressing these needs form the focus of this study. Specifically, these are the relationships between the child and her teacher, and her parents and her teacher.

The literature relating to these relationships is explored. It seeks to blend the dual streams of literature relating to such relationships in the special needs context with that of the everyday relationships of primary school life. It explores the literature relating to the effect of the process of the Individual Education Plan on these relationships. It notes that the majority of such literature focuses on statemented children and often does not have a specific focus on the primary aged child at the earlier, school based stages of the Code of Practice (1994). This perceived "gap" in the research literature forms the rationale for the research study which follows.

The research is within the practitioner-researcher tradition and is located within the school that I am a teacher at. It is qualitative in nature with a focus on a detailed exploration of a small sample. It utilises an interview technique to gain its data.

The study argues that while genuine involvement is often sought, and even presumed, the context of the primary school, the processes of special education and the attitudes of the participants to the relationships tend to result in the teacher retaining the dominant role within the decision making process. It also suggests that the process of the Individual Education Plan may have a somewhat different effect on functioning of the two relationships from that which is often described within the literature.

The dissertation concludes by drawing out the factors which appear to determine whether such relationships are genuinely involving, or not. These are described. It then suggests one

way in which the findings of the research may be practically applied to enhancing the quality of the two relationships which form the basis of this study and so ensure that the needs of the children within the primary school context are most effectively met.

Contents.

Chapter 1 - Beginnings	1
Introduction	1
The rationale for the study	1
The research questions	3
Chapter 2 - The Literature Review.	5
Introduction	5
The effects of the language of special needs education	6
An exploration of the term "relationship".	7
The parent and teacher relationship in practice	12
The pupil and teacher relationship in practice	22
The Individual Education Plan	30
The impacts of ethnicity	34
Enhancing the role of the parent or the child	37
Conclusions	44
Chapter 3 - The Design and Methodology of the Study.	46
Introduction	46
The design of the study	46
The methodology of the study	50
The detail of the methodology - what I actually did	53
Description of the school	65

Chapter 4 - Analysis of the Research Data	69
Introduction	69
The parent and teacher relationship	69
The child and teacher relationship	100
The effect of the IEP on the relationships	116
Chapter 5 - Patterns of Interaction	128
Introduction	128
Three types of relationship	128
(i) the involving	129
(ii) the neutral	132
(iii) the non-involving	135
Some key points which affected how involving the relationship was	138
Chapter 6 - Reflections on the methodology chosen	140
Introduction	140
(a) the use of semi-structured interviews	140
(b) the "value" of the data collected	147
(c) analysis of the data and the development of themes	150
(d) the use of a "critical friend" and isolated reflection	151
(e) the possible limitations of the use of a single site	153
Chapter 7 - Conclusions	155
Introduction	155
What is the nature of the relationship between the teacher and the parents of children defined as having special educational needs ?	155
What is the nature of the relationship between the teacher and the child defined as having special educational needs ?	161

Doctor of Education (EdD)	A.W. James (M7125275)
What effect does having a written IEP have on these relationships ?	165
Turning theory into possible practice - some action points	
to develop practice	167
A comment on the revised draft Code of Practice	174
The future - the "usefulness" of the study.	175
Concluding personal remarks	177
References	178

List of Figures.

Chapter 1 - Beginnings.	1
Chapter 2 - The Literature Review.	5
Figure 2.1 - The parent and teacher relationship - Atkin <i>et al.</i> , 1988.	13
Chapter 3 - The Design and Methodology of the Study.	46
Figure 3.1 - Diagram showing the groupings for three children.	53
Figure 3.2 - Table showing level of parental involvement in school of the sample.	55
Figure 3.3 - Table showing the study sample.	56
Figure 3.4 - Tables showing potential sample of children within school - April 1998 to April 1999.	57
Figure 3.5 - Table showing timing of interviews (April 1998 to April 1999).	58
Figure 3.6 - The labels used on the cards of the "game".	62
Chapter 4 - Analysis of the Research Data.	69
Chapter 5 - Patterns of Interaction.	128
Figure 5.1 - Table of quotations relating to the perspectives and experiences of the Henry grouping.	129
Figure 5.2 - Table of quotations relating to the perspectives and experiences of the Devi grouping.	132
Figure 5.3 - Table of quotations relating to the perspectives and experiences of the Belinda grouping.	135

Chapter 6 - Reflections on the methodology chosen.	144
---	------------

Chapter 7 - Conclusions.	159
---------------------------------	------------

Appendices (in separate document).

Appendix 1 - Interview transcripts for the Negus grouping of relationships (known as Henry in the body of the text).	1
Appendix 2 - Interview transcripts for the Maryam grouping of relationships (known as Devi in the body of the text).	56
Appendix 3 - Interview transcripts for the Natelle grouping of relationships (known as Belinda in the body of the text).	85
Appendix 4 - Guide sheet used as basis of interviews with children.	119
Appendix 5 - Guide sheet used as basis of interviews with parents.	121
Appendix 6 - Guide sheet used as basis of interviews with teachers and support staff.	123

Chapter 1 - Beginnings.

Introduction.

The primary focus of this study is to explore how to build the relationships between the child, her parents, or carers, and teacher so that the most effective use of them can be made in the process of planning to meet the needs of children with special educational needs. This is most effectively done where all are genuinely involved in this process.

The study explores two crucial relationships within the school context. Firstly, the relationship between the children themselves and their teacher. Secondly, the relationship between the children's parents, or carers, and their teacher. It seeks not only to explore how such relationships function within a particular school but why they function in the ways that they do - for good or for ill. It then seeks to draw out of the research literature, and the research data provided by this study, key factors which may help to ensure that these crucial relationships genuinely work in the interests of the child.

The study is located within a single, one-form entry primary school in the inner city of Birmingham. At the time of the study I was a teacher at the school. As a piece of practitioner research the study seeks to function at two levels. Firstly, it seeks to enhance the way in which the needs of a specific group of children are provided for. Secondly, it seeks to provide a focused study, rich in detail, which may add to the debate concerning how to utilise the relationships between the teachers, parents and child to most effectively meet the needs of children with special educational needs.

The rationale for the study.

My interest in the role of these relationships in the process of meeting the needs of children experiencing difficulties at school developed out of a practical need. While there were few children at the time of the study at the school who held a statement of special educational needs, there were a significant number who were considered to require additional help at the earlier school based stages of the Code of Practice (1994). The time required to plan, and

implement, additional help for these children was considerable and placed pressure on the school's resources.

As a result of the reading I was doing at the time concerning how to meet the additional needs of several children within my own class I began to question whether these resources were being used as effectively as possible. Of greatest interest was the premise of much of this literature that such children do better at school if:

(a) the children are genuinely involved in the planning and monitoring process as to how these needs were to be met, and

(b) their parents are also genuinely involved in such planning and monitoring of progress made.

This view is also one that is expressed strongly within official guidance to schools, such as the Code of Practice (1994). The suggestion was that even if the help offered to the children was well planned and implemented, it will tend to be more effective where the parents and the children themselves are involved with the teachers in the decision making process itself.

Within the field of education this type of relationship is generally referred to as one of "partnership". But what does this look like in practice ? What factors and actions help, or hinder, such a relationship to function effectively within a school such as the one that I teach within ? How can the tension between the school's scarce resources and the time it takes to develop such relationships be resolved ? How could the school develop its practice in this area to make a more effective contribution to meeting the needs of children considered to have special needs ?

Within the research literature there are several models of partnership. However, on close examination, many of these models seemed to have limitations when attempting to apply them within the small inner-city primary school context. Consequently, issues of compatibility and "fittingness" appeared to arise in attempting to apply them to meet the needs of the children in my own classroom. These models were helpful in that they may act as guides but were not be specific enough to be used in a detailed way to inform my own

school's practice. What seemed to be needed was a primary specific study exploring these crucial relationships in detail, with the teacher as the central professional.

While the focus of a practitioner-researcher working within a single site cannot claim to provide answers in more general primary school contexts, the school is typical of many smaller inner-city primary schools. Together with a careful description of the context in which the study takes place within, the rich detail that such a study would provide may add to the existing understanding of such relationships. This could then help to ensure the genuine involvement which appears to lead to any additional help having the maximum benefit to the child. As such, this study can best be seen as located within the two areas of (i) parental participation and decision making, and (ii) student perspectives and participation.

The Research Questions.

The focus of the research questions for this study is on the relationships between the teacher (the school professional) and the child, and the teacher and the child's parents, or carers. However, it is not enough to map the process of the relationship. To understand a relationship you have to understand how the participants perceive what happens and why it happens in that way. Hence, the participants' perceptions and interpretations of the developing relationship, their goals for themselves or their child, and their role within that relationship are crucial. There also needs to be an understanding of the context within which such relationships develop.

Consequently, the research questions should seek to elicit these perspectives and understandings. As such I decided that the following three questions should form the core of this study:

- 1) What is the nature of the relationship between the teacher at the school and the parents of children defined as having special educational needs ?
- 2) What is the nature of the relationship between the teacher at the school and the children defined as having special educational needs ?

3) What effect does the structure and process of the Individual Education Plan have on these relationships ?

Chapter 2 - The Literature Review.

Introduction.

The purpose of this literature review is to explore the literature relating the relationships between professionals, parents and pupils in discussion about the child's learning processes and progress and how this can be improved. Such relationships are inevitably complex and changing. However, this review attempts to expose some of the entwining strands that make up such relationships.

For children who are at the school based stages of the Code of Practice (Stages 1 to 3) their experience is bound up in the everyday functioning of the school and its routines. There is a blending of the normal day to day interaction between the home and school, and the additional structure to provide additional help to the child because of her needs. It is by exploring both the areas that a fuller, and more rounded, picture of these relationships will be arrived at.

As such, the review draws on two, often distinct, lines of literature. Firstly, the literature focussing on everyday home and school relationships (especially that of the Early Years). Secondly, on the literature relating to children who are considered to have special educational needs. Much of this latter research relates to children who are about to hold or already hold a statement of need. As such, the professional involved is often a professional who works outside of the school or in a context which is significantly different from the mainstream primary school.

However, the evolution of a genuine relationship cannot be examined devoid of the context in which it operates. The language and procedures that underlie, and structure, the relationship inevitably impact on it. Consequently, the review first considers some of the issues surrounding the language and terminology used about children considered to have special needs. Further, one of the occasions when the parent, teacher and pupil meet is when they review, and plan the child's Individual Education Plan. This is an additional element in the relationships surrounding meeting the needs of children experiencing special needs at

school. Consequently, the review also explores the possible effects of the process of the Individual Education Plan on these relationships.

Further context is then added to this discussion by a consideration of the effect of ethnicity - an important issue in a culturally diverse context such as the one to be studied. Finally, the review turns to the debate in the literature about how to ensure a more genuinely involving relationship. This centres around the issue of "empowerment".

The effects of the language of special needs education.

As with any area of life, education has its own specialised language and terminology. Each term is a form of "shorthand" for a set of concepts which are associated with that term. It acts as a set of "givens" which then form the basis of any discussion. The term may be understood in different ways by the user and listener, but still acts as a powerful "peg" to hang discussion upon.

The history of the term "special educational needs" is a well known one (for example see Gross, 1996 and Solity, 1992) and does not need to be repeated here. However, the effects that the use of the term has are worth exploring within the literature. In a carefully argued debate of the use of the term "special educational needs" Solity (1992) argues that in practice the term has three distinct effects. Firstly, it focuses on the child as being different from the norm and locates such differences within the child. This has the effect of labelling the child as being different, or separate, from the others in their class (Ainscow, 1994). Secondly, it locates the child's needs within the domain of education and tends to exclude a consideration of the wider context of the child (a point also made by Abberley, 1987). Thirdly, because the need is of an educational nature it indicates that diagnosis of that need is a specialised task best carried out by an expert in education.

Others have gone further. Ainscow (1997) argues that by focusing on the child there is a tendency to overlook the role that the school itself may have in terms of creating an environment which causes the child to have difficulty in their learning. Effectively, the root causes of the difficulties the child is experiencing are firmly located outside the school. The

focus is then on addressing the child's needs individually, rather than looking at the more general improvement in the learning environment to provide greater access for all.

Because of this tendency to focus on the individual it is argued that there is an emphasis on the role of the teacher as the expert who provides solutions (Thomas, 1995). By focusing on the educational context it also serves to emphasise the relative lack of skills on the part of the parents and the child (Ainscow and Muncey, 1989). Thomas (1995, 1997) argues that this tends to put the professional into a paternalistic role and serves to emphasise the relative dominance of the professional and powerlessness of the parent or child.

However, the terminology of special needs is not seen in this rather negative, separated way by all. While agreeing with much that Solity and others argue, Gross (1996) argues that such terminology can have a positive effect for the child. She argues that there will always be a need to distinguish between children who are experiencing difficulties and those who are not. This is to allow the flow of additional resources (both in terms of materials, additional staffing and specialised planning) to such children. Without the use of some form of distinguishing terminology these resources will become diluted and the children's needs become more severe. This point is also made by Wolfendale (1997) and, most forcefully, by Wilson (1999).

An exploration of the term "relationship".

Within the field of education the type of relationship at the heart of this study is usually referred to as one of "partnership". But what does this term mean? What presumptions underlie such a concept?

Many models of "partnership" have been developed within the literature. In essence they appear to fall within two broad categories. The first focuses predominantly on developing a model for the process and structure of building such a partnership - such models tend to fit into the "how to" type of report or manual. The second finds its focus predominantly in the micropolitics of the interaction between the participants to the relationship. This type of model tends to arise out of research and be more reflective in nature. Inevitably, each model

has some overlap within both of these broad categories. However, a useful way to attempt to grasp something of the complexity of "relationship" in this context is to compare and contrast important models from each of these broad groupings.

The process or "how to" model.

A very clear, and carefully argued, example of the first type of model is the "Negotiating Model" put forward by Dale (1996). This model was developed to guide professionals working within the field of special needs in relating in a meaningful way to parents. It is predominantly aimed at health and assessment professionals but is a very detailed process model of how to develop a working relationship. The model is based on a carefully drawn historical perspective and on the experience of the author of extensive case histories.

At the heart of the model is the idea that whatever the perspectives of the participants, it is the role of the professional to embark on a series of interactions with the parents to negotiate a shared understanding. Where this is achieved a joint plan of action is developed. However, Dale does recognise that in a minority of difficult cases such an understanding will not be achieved and other strategies will be required to resolve them.

The interactive or "what is" model.

An example of the second model is that developed by Armstrong (1995) in his research into the assessment and placement of children with emotional and behavioural difficulties into special and residential schools. This model is not developed in the diagrammatic way of Dale's. However, a coherent argument of how such relationships operate can be traced through his work.

The research that Armstrong's conclusions are drawn from comes from two distinct sources. The first is a sample of 29 children from 3 LEAs who had been referred to an Educational Psychologist for assessment on the basis of them having emotional and behavioural difficulties. Armstrong observed the assessment and then used a semi-structured interview technique to probe the perspectives of the participants. The second was based on similar interviews with a sample of 18 further children who had already been placed in off-site

residential special schools. For both samples the sampling showed a good range in terms of gender, class and age. However, it should be noted that the majority of the children interviewed were at the top end of the primary age range and beyond into the secondary age range. The research is carefully conducted and the conclusions drawn carefully argued and, as such, persuasive.

At the heart of Armstrong's model is the argument that what is of prime importance is not the process itself, but rather the respective power of the participants to influence and guide the decisions reached within that process. Combined with the perspectives of the participants these micropolitical factors define the type of relationship achieved in practice.

Having briefly outlined and considered each model independently I now wish to begin to compare the models and draw out some of the strands of the concept of "relationship".

i) The formation of an issue.

For both models the starting point is that an issue arises that gives rise to concern on part of the parent or the professional. While Dale (1996) recognises that the power to influence the eventual decisions made will be unequal it is the mutuality of the concern which is key.

Armstrong (1995), on the other hand, points out that it is often a professional who works with the child that raises the initial concern and that this professional often has strong ideas about what they hope to achieve by raising this concern.

This difference probably arises out of the difference in the contexts for the models. In the case of a child presenting difficult behavioural issues, the child will often be causing disruption and stress on the person dealing with the child on a day to day basis. Hence their agenda to change the child's behaviour and the tendency for the professional to have goals for what they want to happen. What is important, however, is to recognise that such a relationship will often not begin with a sense of all participants feeling there is a concern to be addressed. Even at the outset there may well be no mutuality (to use Dale's terminology) that there is a concern to attempt to resolve.

ii) The perspectives of the participants.

Both models recognise that the perspectives of the parents and professionals may differ in terms both of the causes of the child's needs and what should be done to mitigate those needs. There is a high level of agreement between the models about the nature of such differing perspectives. That is, that they arise out of the life experiences and underlying belief systems of the participants, some of which will be contextual and some cultural.

However, Armstrong also argues that once a concern has been raised the parent, or child, tend to bring with them a belief that the professional's role is one of diagnosing what is "wrong". In other words one perspective that is brought into such a relationship is one of underlying submissiveness to the professional as the expert. As such, the role of the leader within the relationship is generally assumed to lie with the professional.

Having noted this level of agreement it can be argued that both models underestimate the level of difference that can exist. In her research into the Bangladeshi community in Tower Hamlets, Tomlinson argues that the differences in perspective between the parent and the professional are very much wider than often claimed (Tomlinson, 1993). The differing racial and cultural beliefs and stereotypes led to a gulf of misunderstanding which, in her study, formed an effective barrier to meaningful relationships between the parent and professional. It would appear wise, then, not simply to recognise differences will exist but to recognise the potential depth and breadth of these differences. This may be both in relation to the nature of the concern, the understanding of the other participants perspectives and their roles within the relationship.

iii) The interaction between the participants.

The key differences between the Dale and Armstrong models exist in the aspect of the interaction between the participants. For Dale this interaction takes the form of careful negotiation over a period of time and leads to a shared understanding of the concern and how to proceed. At the base of this is her belief that the professional should act as a paternalistic advisor, aware of their expertise and the power this confers, but having the goodwill to share and guide the parent to reach a consensus where there is genuine give and

take. Hence, if the professional is not neutral they should make every effort to bridge the gap between themselves and the parent to reach a point where both have a genuine input into the decisions reached.

Armstrong strongly disagrees that the arrival at a genuinely shared understanding can, and will, happen in reality. He argues that there are both contextual and micro-political reasons why this will not happen, and that in any case the professional is far from neutral within the partnership. The basis of the relationship is one of professional dominance - even if, in many cases, this is not intended. Contextually the professional holds the key "card" in any genuine decision making process - access to information. In terms of the micro-politics of the relationship such interaction tends to take place within the domain of the professional. It has already been argued that the parent tends to look to the professional for a diagnosis and these combine to further enhance the dominance of the professional.

However, it is argued by others that both authors may have overlooked the different focus of the perspectives of the teacher and parent. While the teacher will tend to focus specifically on an educational difficulty, the parent will tend to have a wider view. For the parent the educational difficulty may be the least of their worries in the often difficult and exhausting context of family life (Seligman and Darling, 1997).

Nor can it be accepted, as Dale appears to suggest, that the professional has a perspective which allows them to act in a "neutral" advisory role. This view greatly underestimates the pressures on the professional from more external factors. These may include the demands of the other professionals involved (e.g. a teacher who wants extra resources or the child out of their classroom), the policies of the Local Education Authority (LEA.), and the wider issue of having to prioritise scarce resources over many "clients" (Wolfendale, 1997, Gersch, 1996). As Armstrong further shows, many professionals are all too aware of the potential danger of simply filtering out the views of the parent or child. However, even if the professional can resist the all too human temptation to do this it is unrealistic to expect them to ignore the wider external constraints on them.

iv) Roles within planning and implementing support.

A final aspect to consider of these two models is that of the roles that are taken, or assigned, to the participants in terms of the specific action to be taken as a result of their discussions. For Dale this is a joint role which may be unequal in terms of who does what but can be subject to genuine mutual re-negotiation and refining.

For Armstrong the relative power of the professional means that the core decisions are made by the professional, leaving the more peripheral decisions to be made in consultation with the parent, or child. In addition, if these decisions are resisted by the parent, or child, there is a tendency for them to become seen as part of the problem itself and the decisions to become imposed ones. Armstrong argues that this happens often as a result of a genuine desire on the part of the professional to do what is in the "best interests" of the child.

Having begun to draw out some of these issues it is now important to explore the wider research literature to see how they work out in the specific context of primary school life.

The parent and teacher relationship in practice.

That children benefit most from provision where professionals and parents are both involved and working together is now a well established principle within the literature (for example see Wolfendale, 1993, Bastiani, 1993, Russell, 1996b). It is also a principle built into the Code of Practice (1994, para. 2:28).

(a) what perspectives do the participants bring to the relationship ?

Within the context of the primary school the professional who will have the majority of contact with the parent is the classroom teacher. Typically the child is taught by a single teacher for the majority of their time in school in any one year. This is so in the school being studied. As the child gets older and more independent the daily contact between teacher and parent will tend to diminish and the type of contact will become more formalised. Because

the parent will come into school less on a daily basis the meetings will tend to be planned rather than the more informal chat at the classroom door typical of many primary classes.

A very concise and clear diagram of what the parent and teacher bring to this relationship is set out by Atkin *et al* (1988). This is set out in the diagram below.

1

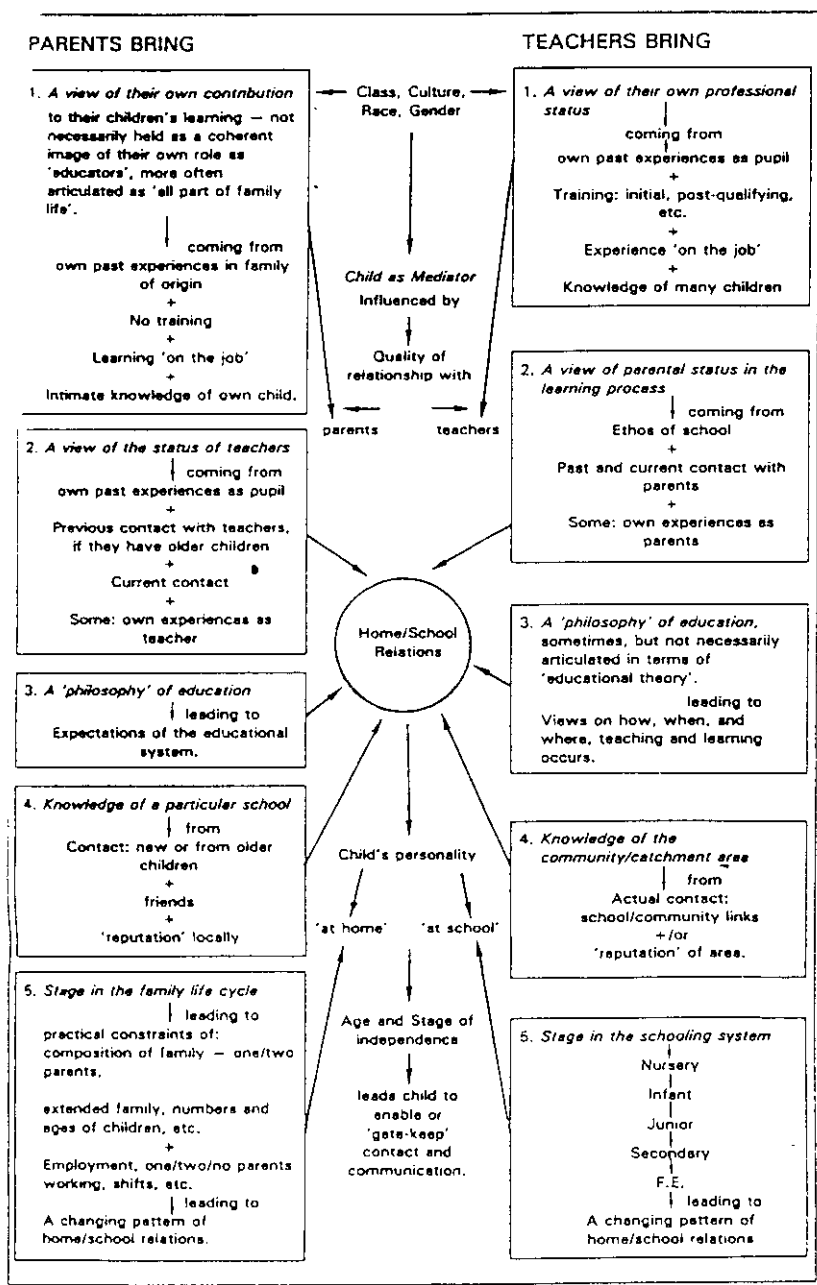


Figure 2.1 (Atkin *et al*, 1988, Page 24, Fig 4.1.)

It can be seen that the basis of the perspectives each bring are complex and made up of several elements. These are partly based on values held, experiences encountered and an understanding of their own part in the relationship between home and school. This is often not articulated clearly, but strongly held. There is also room within this model for considerable variation of response between different parents within the same school.

It is also clear from this diagram that the focus of the perspectives is different. The focus of the teacher is on the education of the child and the impact that outside influences have within that specific process. This can provide the professional with a narrow range of information to base decisions on. The focus of the parent tends to be the broader one of school being a part of the wider context of family life. Beveridge (1997) suggests that this wider view means that the parents generally have a broader, more in-depth, knowledge of their child. Mallett (1997) further suggests that there are several other important differences in the basis of their perspectives on the relationship. Essentially these revolve around the fact that the professional tends to view their involvement as one which is time limited, that they are trained to operate within and one which they can pass on to another professional if they feel the need. This is very different in the case of the parent. It is not surprising, then, that while the underlying aims of the teacher and parent are often stated as "wanting the best for the child" they are in practice often perceived as very different. Indeed, this can lead to both participants viewing the other with the suspicion that they are more interested in their own desires rather than the needs of the child (Braun, 1992).

i) The parent's perspectives.

In an interesting and thoughtful discussion of parent and teacher relationships within the context of Early Years home and school relationships Braun (1992) makes the important point that it is often only when something goes wrong, or a disagreement occurs, that the true nature of such relationships reveals itself. Until this happens the parents tend to accept the role assigned to them and fit within the structure for contact that the school has put into place. As Braun goes on to argue, this is often a role as supporter of the school's decisions and a structure which allows the parents access to only those parts of the life of the school that the teacher feels comfortable with sharing.

However, when something does go "wrong" the parental reaction is often not one of blame, even if this appears so superficially, but rather one of looking to the professional to provide a solution. Braun argues that this is because parents often feel that they are in some way responsible as parents if something happens concerning their child. When approached by the teacher feelings of "guilt" and inadequacy rise to the surface and there is a tendency to look to the teacher as an expert to diagnose the problem and provide a suitable solution. This may be added to by the underlying belief that even though the child's teacher may be relatively new to the parents there is an expectation that the teacher will think and behave in a "fair" way in terms of how they treat the child (Beveridge, 1997, Seligman and Darling, 1997). However, this may not be such a strongly held belief in parents from some ethnic minorities (Tomlinson, 1993).

What effects does the issue of the child having special needs have on these perspectives ? Braun (1992) argues that the effects are mainly related to their view of the status and perceived roles of the professional and parent within the relationship itself. Like Armstrong (1995), Braun found a strong tendency amongst parents that if something was felt to be "wrong" then the professional was the expert who should be looked to to provide a diagnosis. There was an expectation that it was the professional who would take charge of the situation and eventually provide a solution.

Other studies have suggested that this perception may be enhanced by the belief that as parents they lack the technical knowledge that professionals are believed to have (Knill and Humphries, 1996). Further, that parents often will have had their suspicions about the child's difficulties confirmed by family friends, or, otherwise, have their own suspicions heightened by having kept them to themselves and not put them up to the scrutiny of another's views. Consequently, even if it is the parent who raises the concern there will still be a tendency to feel a sense of inadequacy and to look to the professional to define what is wrong and to take a lead in providing a solution (Simeonsson, 1995). However, parents generally do want to be involved in finding solutions to their child's needs (Long, 1986) but can easily feel overburdened by the process of meetings and form-filling that can ensue (Russell, 1997)

Finally, in his research Armstrong (1995) did find there was a greater tendency amongst his parents for them to blame the teacher for the situation. This appears to have been because

they felt that the teacher was scapegoating the child to make up for their own inadequacies. This may partly be explained by the nature of the sample (Armstrong was focusing on children with fairly severe behavioural difficulties) or by the fact that the sample was generally much older than the group under discussion by Braun. It may be that the nature of the difficulty or the stage in the education process that the child is in affects the balance between locating the cause in themselves as parents or the school context. However, in all these studies the tendency to approach the relationship with the perception that the professional as the expert who will provide a solution is marked.

ii) the professionals' perspectives.

In terms of the professionals' perspectives Braun (1992) argues that, often, teachers articulate that it is the parents who are the prime educators and carers of the child. However, there is an underlying belief that many of the problems and difficulties the child encounters can be located within the home and parenting environment. She argues that this is often because of a lack of understanding of the culture and routines of the family and a tendency to underestimate how much the family has achieved with the child outside of school. In effect, then, when problems and difficulties arise there is an underlying tendency to "blame the family". This view may also be enhanced when the professional feels that the suggestions put forward by the parents conflict with their view of what is in "the best interests of the child" . This will tend to be most evident where, in the case of the teacher, the views put forward by the parent bring into question the teacher's ability to cope within the classroom (Armstrong, 1995). As Long (1986) notes teachers tend to feel that they are best positioned because of their training to make decisions about the educational needs of the child.

Other studies have argued that this tendency has its base in what the teacher perceives to be a "good parent". In a careful study of relationships in two London primary schools Vincent (1996) found a strong tendency amongst staff to judge parents against what they themselves thought made a good parent. In effect the teachers were using their own, often white middle-class, values to make decisions about the actions and reactions of parents from a wide variety of differing backgrounds. There is also some evidence (Holden et al, 1986, and Sandow, 1994) that some teachers also have a tendency to react more favourably toward

parents who they feel share their values and where the difficulty is of a learning type as opposed to that of a behavioural type.

It has also been argued that where the perceived difficulty is of an academic nature there is a presumption that parents would want the teacher to take the lead because such matters are outside their knowledge (Beveridge, 1997). This is an important perception, because such difficulties most often present themselves primarily within the classroom and if the teacher feels that the parents would want them to take a lead this may affect the way and level at which parents are informed and consulted about such difficulties.

A further study is of interest here. As part of a wider study concerned with the teacher's working day Hancock (1998) found that the teacher often perceived that they were forced into choosing between the competing priorities of educating the child and the time taken to build a meaningful relationship with the parents. Hancock concluded that it was the perception of the teachers that their primary concern lies with the task of educating the child and that they tended to assign a lower priority to meeting with the parents. This rather narrow view of education also suggests that if the parents are already seen as at fault, or unhelpful, the pressures of time on teachers will tend to allow the need to involve parents to slip even further down the list of priorities within the school day. This will be further added to if, as Bowers and Wilkinson (1998) argue, the teacher feels under pressure to complete the additional paperwork required on such children. In this sense the lack of urgency to involve the parents may be seen as a survival strategy within an already heavily congested day. This suggests that where sufficient time is not made by the Headteacher to allow meeting with parents a perspective of being reluctant to make such time may develop as a result of these perceived conflicting priorities.

Finally, the perspectives of the teacher may be affected by the external pressures on the teacher. While there may be a belief in allowing parents a choice in how their child's needs are met this may be tempered by the need to control the use of resources available to meet the needs of children more generally (Wolfendale, 1997).

It is now necessary to explore how these perceptions are affected by the process of the building of the actual relationship between the parent and the teacher.

(b) how are such relationships formed ?

In a careful review of the literature (both research and theoretical) relating to home and school partnerships Bastiani (1993) concludes that there are four essential criteria for building a positive relationship between the teacher and the parents. These are:

- (i) that any communication is genuinely two way - that each party listens to the other and values what is said,
- (ii) that access to the teacher, and the school more widely, is available in a variety of ways and at times which suit the parents,
- (iii) that the teacher finds ways in which the parents feel that they are genuinely encouraging and supporting their child, and
- (iv) that the relationship builds a sense of "shared identity and common purpose".

These criteria can also be found in other reviews of the literature (for example, Dale, 1996, and Hegarty, 1993), albeit in slightly different language. In a sense these seem obvious but as Bastiani himself admits they are in practice very difficult to achieve. Indeed Bastiani even goes so far as to argue that the aim of home and school relationships should not be partnership itself but a working towards the ideal of partnership.

The reasons for these difficulties are not hard to find. As Braun (1992) argues, if the participants are to listen to, and value, what each other says, then their perceptions of each other must be that they have worthwhile views to express. In the case of the teacher and parent this has already been seen often to not to be the case. As such, the resulting communication can often serve only to help confirm further the underlying perspectives held by the participants in the first place.

This positioning within the relationship may be emphasised by the existing roles that parents are seen to have within the school. Often parents fulfil a role within the school which is that of a helper rather than that of a valued equal. Typically, they may act as reading assistants, help with activities such as cooking or art activities, or help run the school library. These activities are on the periphery of school life and generally involve the parent in a role which is defined by the school, or by a particular teacher. In effect they are learning that

involvement is on the terms of the school and not the more meaningful involvement which leads to each seeing the other as a valued equal (Long, 1986). If this is the role presented to the parent in the school more widely it is hardly surprising that they do not naturally perceive themselves, and react, as valued partners in discussions about their children (Vincent, 1996, and Hegarty, 1993).

Further, the idea of fitting opportunities to meet with parents at a variety of times convenient to the parent is one that is difficult to achieve in practice in the primary school. As Hancock (1998) points out, such teachers often have very limited, if any, non-contact time within the school day. As such, meetings are often forced to fit in with the working day of the teacher or are rushed, and often public, affairs at the classroom door, before or after school. The result of this may be that the parent feels that they have to fit in with the schedule of the teacher or that their wish to raise issues are unwelcome. This may not be intentional but it does create a pattern to the relationship which is very far from the criteria set out by Bastiani earlier.

This will be particularly so if the initial contact between the parent and the school staff is one where the parent feels unwelcome or intrusive. Mallett (1997) found that where this initial contact was not perceived by the parent to have been successful there was a strong tendency for this to colour their expectations of future meetings. While there is some more anecdotal evidence that this may vary from teacher to teacher (Gillespie, 1996) it is not unreasonable to expect that if a previous attempt at contact has proved unsatisfactory then future ones are made with greater reluctance and less confidence in their outcome.

Within this context it is also difficult to achieve the goal of a "shared identity and common purpose". It has been seen that the parents tend to look to the professional to lead the way. The identity and purpose will tend to be defined by the professional. Considerable time may also need to be expended to genuinely involve the parents at this level (Dale, 1996 and Hegarty, 1993). This may be especially problematic where the teacher feels untrained to attempt this type of relationship building (Bryans, 1989). It is probably not co-incidental that many of the writers who put forward this type of criterion base their work within the field of health professionals or other professionals outside of the classroom (such as Educational Psychologists). In these cases their work more often focuses on the planned one-to-one

meeting where, in theory at least, there is more opportunity and time to talk in a constructive way.

(c) what do we know of parent and teacher meetings in schools?

Within the normal day to day functioning of the primary school contact between teacher and parent will generally take place in three contexts. The first is that of parents' evening, the second that of the informal talk at the beginning or end of the day, and the third the arranged meeting to discuss a specific issue. This may be supplemented by general or personal letters home.

The view that parents have of parents' evenings as an effective means of communication are mixed within the literature. While some parents reported that they felt it was a profitable opportunity to talk openly (Beveridge, 1997), others felt that it was too public an environment to discuss such issues openly and in sufficient detail (Holden, 1993). This discrepancy is interesting. A careful examination of the two reports referred to does seem to offer a solution however. In the first report there was a strong emphasis on the value parents gave to positive comments made by the teacher about the child. In the second the emphasis was on the lack of privacy for discussion about the child's difficulties. It may well be that while parents don't mind the public nature of a packed parents' evening if positive comments are made, they do mind that context if the teacher wishes to discuss issues which may be interpreted to reflect less favourably on the child.

In the case of meetings arranged specifically to consider the needs of the child with special needs a clearer pattern emerges. However, it is important to remember that in the literature most of these meetings refer to children who are at Stages 4 or 5 of the Code of Practice(1994), and often involve several professionals (either in the meeting or having met with the parent and reporting back).

In their work concerning the "user friendliness" of the Code of Practice, Bowers and Wilkinson (1998) found that it was in these types of more formal meeting that parents felt particularly inhibited. Partly this was because of the context and formality of the meeting itself. However, another aspect was the presumption on the part of the professional that

parents understood, and were in agreement with, the underlying principles of the Code of Practice itself. Put bluntly, because they felt comfortable with this aspect of the context of the discussion there was a presumption that the parents would also. As Bowers and Wilkinson point out this is not a position that many parents would find themselves in, and hence do not understand much of what ensues.

Jowett (1991) makes two further important points here. Firstly that within such a meeting the agenda, concerns, and place of the meeting are usually within the control of the professional. The parents are generally meeting in an environment that is the confident domain of the professional and have often had little time to prepare for the issues to be raised (Beveridge, 1997). It is also suggested in a careful study of the American system that the use of language tends to support the view that the meeting is the domain of the professional (Beckman and Stepanek, 1996). This may be in the use of technical language, but equally so in the way that the parent is referred to and spoken to (for example, as mum or dad, rather than the more formal named titles given to the professional). The perceived powerlessness of the situation can effectively lead to a classic "flight or fight" reaction and possibly explains why parents are often perceived as passive or aggressive (Gross, 1996).

Gasgoigne (1995) also points out that the parents may also be in situation where they are one parent amongst several professionals. This understandably can lead to feelings of insecurity and the parent's voice being lost amongst the many. If, as is more likely to be the case in this study, the meeting is of a one-to one type the views of other professionals may have been sought (be they inside or outside the school). This may mean that the teacher has several people's opinions to rely on which the parent has not been privy to until the meeting. Alternatively, the teacher may have several reports of meetings between professionals and parents with the views of the parents having been considered and reported back with the "filter" of each professional's understanding. This again can lead to the parents' voice becoming diluted and the parent feeling that their views in several meetings have been undervalued (Gasgoigne, 1995, and Mallett, 1997).

Secondly, Armstrong found that with the parental desire for a diagnosis there was a tendency not to listen so carefully to the procedural information provided during the meeting. Consequently, when the parents wished to express their views they often did not have a

sufficient grasp of the procedures to do this effectively and influence the outcome. The procedures had been explained, often with care, but in their anxiety the parents had simply not paid close enough attention to something they perceived to be less important.

Consideration of other research suggests that there is a further issue that needs to be considered. This is the issue of information given to the parents. There has long been a concern about the level and accessibility of information offered to parents (Docking, 1990). There is some evidence that, at least at Stages 4 and 5, this is now improving (Wolfendale, 1997a). However, in a broad survey of schools a recent OFSTED report, which focused on stage three planning and provision, found that the level of written information to parents was still inconsistent and, in many cases, confusing (OFSTED, 1997). Given this it is inevitable at this stage of the Code of Practice for most parents that the primary source of information will be the teacher that they are involved with. Predominantly this will be done through conversation with that teacher (or the special educational needs co-ordinator [SENCo], depending on how the school's provision is organised). In a very real sense, then, the teacher is the "information guardian" (Mallett, 1997). The depth of information, and the range of choices to be made, depends greatly on the teacher's willingness to share these with the parent. This, again, may lead to an emphasis within the meeting on the dominance of the professional and pressure on parents to accept what the professional offers to them.

The pupil and teacher relationship in practice.

When considering the relationship between the pupil and the professional in the context of this study it is important to realise who that professional is. That professional is most often the teacher in the classroom and for most primary school children they are predominantly taught by only one teacher. The relationship is an intense one. This means that unlike much of the literature concerning special needs the professional is not a stranger about who, and whose role, the child knows very little.

However, the teacher is also the person in the school who has the greatest control over the child on a day to day basis. If things are not working well in the class it is the teacher who also has the greatest, immediate self-interest in finding a solution. This will be particularly so

where the concerns are of a behavioural nature, because of the threat that such behaviour poses to the perception of the teacher as the coping expert (Ingram and Worrall, 1993).

Why should the teacher be interested in the child's perspective ?

As with the duty to involve parents in the decision making process there is also a duty on schools to consider how they should involve the children themselves (Code of Practice, 1994, paras. 2:36 and 37). There is a recognition that involvement within the decision making process will lead to greater motivation on the part of the child because any additional support will take into account the point of view of the child. It is perhaps self-evident, but important to recognise, that where a person feels consulted and listened to they are more likely to become engaged in the process rather than simply being a recipient of another's views (Wearmouth, 1999). This, in turn, will tend to enhance their self-esteem and confidence (Gersch, 1996). Further, the Code also recognises that children often hold information which is crucial in setting up an effective way of working with the children which is tailored to their needs. This will be enhanced where the teacher uses such consultation to reflect on the effectiveness of their current practice for the classroom curriculum as a whole and the place of the child within that curriculum (Gersch, 1996). Finally, there is also a recognition that children have a right to be heard (Davies, 1996, and Cooper, 1993).

This view is largely in line with legislation in other fields such as the Children Act 1989 and the ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. It has also found expression in other Government circulars in recent times (for example Circular 8/94, DfEE, 1994b, which refers to the positive effect of involvement of children within their own behaviour management programmes).

(a) what perspectives do the participants bring to the relationship ?

i) the teachers' perspectives.

As with the teachers' perspectives concerning parents, Armstrong found in his study that a balancing act was being played out in the perspectives of the teachers toward the child. On one side was the desire (often quite strong) to involve the child, and offer advice to achieve

this, while on the other was the desire to act in what they perceived to be in the "best interests of the child". Where the two came into conflict Armstrong (1995) found that there was a tendency to rely on their own judgement and follow what they believed to be in the "best interests of the child". However, in contrast to this finding, Gersch (1996) did find, in admittedly a small scale study, some evidence to suggest that teachers felt not only that they had an increased desire to ask the child, but were in fact doing so more frequently than before.

This perspective is in many ways understandable. The teacher is trained to take charge and to guide the child. Essentially this is a directive function (Ingram and Worrall, 1993). Further, the application of the label "special needs" will also tend to place the child in a context where they are seen as being different from the class as a whole and, thus, needing specialist help (Bearn and Smith, 1998). In this sense the teacher will be already predisposed to decide for the child. Further, as Ross (1996) notes, involving the child in a decision making process and being able to listen to their views are skills that teachers often feel themselves poorly trained in, and many older teachers may have had very little training to achieve these aims.

This tendency to decide for the child is also enhanced by the pressures of the working day. It has already been noted that within the day priority tends to be given to the aspects of planning and the learning of the child. In this context consulting with the child themselves tends to be squeezed out by these priorities which are seen as a more effective use of time (Hancock, 1998).

Such an approach is also partly understandable if the evidence that teachers tend to base their views of the child's difficulty on is considered. Armstrong *et al.* (1993) argue there is a tendency to rely on the testing of the child, as opposed to asking and discussing with the child themselves. Again, this role is at the heart of the teacher's view of themselves as an expert. It is also not an area that the children will have experience in and few would expect children, certainly primary age children, to be able to understand the results produced by such tests. This enhances the power of the professional as a diagnoser, because they are the ones who can make sense of the results of the testing. Further, because of the tendency to have a narrow focus and to not look at the wider context of the child, the child's views may,

sometimes, seem to be unrelated to the issue as the teacher perceives it (Armstrong and Galloway, 1996).

These perspectives need also to be linked with the view of many teachers that even where the views of the child are ascertained these may not be long-term, or stable, enough to base support on (Gersch, 1996). Either way, there is an almost inbuilt predisposition for the teacher to take the lead in any decision making.

ii) the pupils perspectives.

In an interesting review of the literature concerning children's views and their involvement in special needs practice, Davies (1996) discusses some of the perspectives that such children bring to this relationship. While the article does need to be treated with some caution because of the lack, in some parts, of a clear distinction drawn between children of differing ages, some helpful points are made.

Davies argues that what children look for in such relationships is someone who is "fair" and does not, in their view, perceive them as a problem. By "fair" the children identified the characteristics of consistency, a willingness to listen and discuss, and a willingness to negotiate. The desire to negotiate rather than accept what the teacher said was weakest amongst the younger children. Davies also found that the children, but particularly the younger children, found it difficult to disassociate actions and decisions from the people making them. This was particularly where the child did not perceive that there was a problem.

These points can be further developed by reference to two other studies. In a helpful study of Year 7 children with special needs, Galloway *et al.* (1995) found a marked tendency on the part of the children to have a low self-perception of themselves. This was argued to result from the history of failure that the child had experienced in school. This showed itself most clearly in the desire to avoid situations and tasks which they felt would impact on their already fragile self-esteem.

The second study is an American study into the impact of teacher perceptions on their own self perception (Cole *et al.*, 1997). What this large study (based on junior aged children) argues is that children do not view teacher comments on one area as a comment on that area alone. A comment on one area tends to affect the self perception of the child more widely. This is strongest where the child perceives that they are being told the same things about themselves across a range of areas or by several people. In other words children tend not to think discretely but add each view to an overall view of themselves which is then more generally applied across all areas.

Taken together these studies present an interesting view of the perspectives that the child may bring to the teacher and child relationship. If the children perceive that they are struggling in class then they are likely already to have a fragile self-esteem and the last thing they will want is to have this struggle pointed out to them by the teacher. Indeed they may well have constructed strategies that they feel have ensured their survival within the classroom without drawing attention to themselves (Ingram and Worrall, 1993). This will be strongest where they perceive that the teacher looks on them as a problem within the class.

If they do not perceive that they are struggling it is likely that the raising of the issue will not be perceived as an objective enquiry. Rather, because young children find it difficult to separate the actions of a teacher from the teacher themselves, they will tend to perceive it as a judgement of the teacher on them. This will tend to cause some confusion, or possibly anger, because it may conflict with the child's view of her position in the class and seem "unfair" (Davies, 1996). Further, if this is raised on several occasions, or other professionals raise the same issue, this may communicate itself into a more widely held self perception of failure and difficulty. This, in turn, may encourage the formation of the defensive barrier. This will not be helped by the tendency, for the teacher to assume the role of authoritatively defining what that difficulty is (Armstrong *et al.*, 1993).

(b) how are such relationships formed ?

In two well argued articles concerned with developing relationships within the field of special needs with pupils, Russell (1996a) and Roller (1998) put forward criteria for helping

ensure the success of child and professional relationships. By success they mean that the child becomes an active participant in the relationship.

Russell (1996a), puts forward seven criteria:

- i) the right professional needs to be chosen - one that is capable of being trusted by the child.
- ii) there needs to be a view of need which is wider than the academic.
- iii) the professional needs to provide "impartial support".
- iv) there is a need to recognise, and understand, the social context that the child lives within.
- v) the involvement between the child and professional needs to be part of the normal routine of the school.
- vi) the child needs to understand what they can do if they do not agree with what is being said.
- vii) consideration needs to be given to enabling the child to cope with their situation, as well as participate in the relationship (this criterion is not part of the original list but is added later in the article and is worth adding at this point).

While Roller (1998) would agree with these criteria, her argument is that without the ability and freedom to reach decisions which the professional may not reach themselves, "involvement" is a hollow word. Consequently, she adds three further criteria to this list. She argues that without access to information about the procedures and choices to be made the relationship can never become two way. Further, there must be genuine, and ongoing, consultation between the child and the teacher. Finally, there must be real choice between alternative forms of support or targets and the child will be allowed to choose even if the teacher does not necessarily see the eventual choice as being in the best interest of that child.

These criteria are clear but raise a series of issues if the perspectives of the professional and their role within the school is considered. The first relates to the person who forms the relationship with the child. In the primary school this is traditionally by a single teacher over whom the child has no choice. In effect, then, whether the person is someone the child feels that they can trust is not an option here - it is rather, as Dale (1996) argues, up to the professional to bridge the gap to form the relationship.

The second relates to the curriculum and the role of the teacher. As has already been argued, traditionally teaching is a directive role which is focused on the academic. When it does look more widely at the social context the child lives within, this is done primarily to locate the cause of the child's difficulties within that context (Braun, 1992). Today this role is one which is set within an increasingly fixed, and directive, curriculum (one only has to examine the National Literacy [1998] or National Numeracy [1999] Strategies to realise this). It is one which, some argue, does not encourage meaningful dialogue between the teacher and pupil because of the hierarchical relationship engendered by such a curriculum (Ingram and Worrall, 1993).

It has long been realised that within this context there is a strong desire on the part of the child (especially the young child) to respond in the way that they perceive the teacher wants them to respond (Donaldson, 1978). This also needs to be set within the more general context in which there is a strong tendency within young children to focus on the aspects of respect, obedience and conformity in their relationships with teachers and other staff. Further, these aspects are messages often heavily re-inforced by the staff they have contact with (Haroun and O'Hanlon, 1997).

A third issue is the concept of "impartial support". It has already argued that the professional should not be viewed as impartial. They have vested interests in the outcome of any discussions about supporting the child. Indeed, they may be the ones leading the call for support and have very specific ideas about the type of support that they want (Armstrong, 1995).

A further issue is the way in which the child actually responds to the discussion about the difficulty they are experiencing. Russell (1996a) and Roller (1998) both presume that the child will respond to the offer and want to be involved in such discussions. Indeed the work of Tisdall and Dawson (1994) shows clearly that where there is an effort, which is perceived to be genuine by the child, there is a desire to be involved. However, these studies were made in contexts where the child was already involved. Is it true of children when the issue of their difficulty is raised by the teacher? If one returns for a moment to the work of Galloway *et al.* (1995) it may be that because the child wants to avoid entering into discussion which adversely affects her self-esteem she will choose to avoid such an offer. In a sense, then,

because the discussion to the child seems to emphasise her failure she may appear not to be interested or even resist the opportunity to become involved. At the least, this may serve to add to the teacher's view that they should make the decisions for the child, in their best interests.

Finally, in a wide ranging review of good practice (as defined by the LEAs that put forward the schools) Bennethan (1996) found that where schools did seek the views of pupils the motivation for this was a desire for the smooth running of the school rather than to genuinely involve the pupil. This, somewhat cynical, view at least suggests that across a wide range of schools the level of genuinely seeking pupils views may be less than is claimed by schools. This limited level of involvement was also found by OFSTED in terms of the formation of IEPs in primary schools (OFSTED, 1999, para. 56). It also suggests that where such involvement is part of school policy it may still often be little more than tokenistic. However, it should not be overlooked that even if this is the underlying motivation for the senior management it can still provide genuine gains for the child (for example, School D within the sample, where by virtue of a school council junior children had developed a more sophisticated view of how their school operates and how to work within that system).

Within this context, it would not be surprising if the child perceives that school is being done to them, rather than with them. As Rose *et al.* (1996) argue, for children to be genuinely involved they need to be involved in the decision making process concerning how their needs are to be met. At best this context would appear to allow involvement in the periphery of "when" and "how", rather than the more fundamental "what". In this case it may be that the children do not perceive the involvement to be genuine and, hence, choose not to contribute. Indeed, they may feel that their views are not valued in this context and increasingly feel that whatever is said they have no real part to play in this decision making process (Galloway *et al.*, 1995). Within the curriculum the real choices to be made are few and often peripheral. It is not surprising, then, that when Ingram and Worrall (1993) explored how such a relationship could be developed in the classroom they found it was extremely difficult within the normal school day and that much time would need to be expended to make such a relationship more than tokenistic.

(c) what do we know of pupil and professional meetings ?

Perhaps it is in the more formal context of the meeting that the power of the professional over the child is most emphasised and enhanced. As has already been argued studies such as those of Armstrong (1995), Roller (1998) and Armstrong *et al.* (1993) need to be treated with some caution. However, they do present a clear picture of the ways in which the role of the professional is further enhanced at the expense of the involvement of the child.

As with the case of parents the basis of this enhanced position is the context in which the meeting takes place. If children are to become involved in a meaningful sense they need to have an understanding of what will happen so that they feel a sense of control over the situation (Russell, 1996b). While professionals generally do give the children information about the purpose and process of the meeting this is often over their heads and lost in their anxiety of what was going to happen to them. Further, this information is often given at the time of the meeting and the child has little or no opportunity to think or prepare a response (Armstrong, 1995, and Roller, 1998). The result is often silence, a sudden response such as anger or resistance, or the putting forward of views which make sense to the child but appear unrelated to the professional (because they relate to the wider context of the child) (Armstrong *et al.*, 1993). This is then interpreted as the children having no considered view of their situation and the professional felt more able to decide for them. This is often enhanced by the children's confusion over the reasons for the meeting, their tendency to link such meetings with failure on their part, and even, in some cases, with the belief that such meetings are a form of punishment by the teacher (Armstrong, 1995). All of these factors will tend to point out to the children that they have little or no control over what is happening to them and lessen the chances of them becoming genuinely involved in the decision making process.

The Individual Education Plan.

Under the Code of Practice when a child is considered to have special needs an additional level of planning is required to take place to ensure that those needs are being met by the school that the child attends. Teachers are expected to seek to involve both the children and

their parents within this process (Code of Practice, 1994, paras. 2.37 and 2.38 respectively). The outcomes of these discussions and the plan of how to meet the child's additional needs are recorded onto a document called an Individual Education Plan (commonly referred to as an IEP). Such plans are reviewed regularly and, as such, are potentially an important context in which the teacher and parent, and teacher and child relationships may be developed.

The content of such a plan is set out within the Code of Practice in some detail (1994, para. 2.93). However, how this is implemented in practice is left to individual schools, with guidance from their Local Education Authority. In recent reports on the implementation of the Code of Practice (OFSTED, 1997) and the contribution of IEPs (OFSTED, 1999) a series of essential characteristics of the IEP were drawn out. At heart it should be a brief working document that specifies only those things that are extra to the child's classroom curriculum (OFSTED, 1999, para. 11). It should contain a summary of a few short-term targets and how these are to be resourced (OFSTED, 1999, para. 80). As such it should relate closely to the teacher's more general classroom planning (OFSTED, 1997, para. 77) and enable the pupil to make progress in their work more generally (OFSTED, 1999, para. 93).

The IEP is not a new idea. Such a plan has been much used within the United States for several years (under Public Law 94-142, where it is called a program rather than a plan), and the use of individualised plans of work have long been used within the context of special schools and some mainstream schools (Cooper, 1996, Butt and Scott, 1994).

However, within this technical detail it should not be forgotten that the IEP itself is only a small, if important, part in an ongoing process and should not be seen in isolation from the wider context of consultation, discussion and planning that surrounds it. As such the IEP can be seen to have two purposes. Firstly, it is a planning tool to bring together how the child's needs are to be met. Secondly, it provides a record of planning for which the school can be held accountable for their obligation to meet those needs (Cowne, 1998, Tod *et al.*, 1998).

For the purposes of this study the process of designing and reviewing the IEP raises two important questions. Firstly, what effect does this process have on how the needs of the child

are met ? Secondly, what effect does this process have on the relationships the teacher forms with the children and their parents ?

Several claims are often made concerning the effectiveness of the IEP process in meeting the child's needs. By arriving at a clear account of what the child's needs are that is understood, and agreed to, by the child and those working together to help the child an effective plan of action can be implemented (Cooper, 1996). It is argued that this clarity and sense of common purpose is further enhanced by the use of a structured approach to target setting which provides clearly defined, and measurable, steps for the child to pass through that all can understand (Butt and Scott, 1994). This plan can then be used as a further level of specific differentiation within the classroom curriculum (Carpenter, 1997, Tod *et al.*, 1998). At its best this process can, it is suggested, act as a focus point around which discussions can take place between the teacher, parents and child, while helping the teacher to modify the classroom curriculum to allow the child with special needs to be included within that curriculum (Cowne, 1998, OFSTED, 1997, paras. 11 and 16).

While agreeing that these potential benefits are possible in theory other writers have argued that in practice the IEP process has had very different effects in many cases. Rather than providing a vehicle through which the child can be more effectively included these writers argue that the process actually serves to isolate and exclude the child in practice (Goddard, 1997, Ainscow, 1997). Essentially these two writers argue this from two different directions. Firstly, that the use of a structured, stepped approach to defining how such needs are to be met often leads to packages of work which of the "drill and skill" type. These sit uneasily in the more general classroom curriculum, with the result that they are often taught outside of that classroom curriculum. Effectively they become a "bolt on" addition to the curriculum which removes the child from the very curriculum that the process aims to give them greater access to. McLaughlin (1995) further argues that this partial separation of the child from the classroom curriculum can lead to the child beginning to struggle in areas that they are effectively excluded from. Consequently, it is argued, a downward spiral can begin to come into effect whereby the very approach taken to meet the child's needs can lead to those needs being enhanced and others created. In contrast to this view, however, it must be noted that some commentators have argued that this view reflects the first immediate response to the Code of Practice rather than later practice (Todd *et al.*, 1998) and that little mention of a

heavy reliance on such targets was made in the most recent OFSTED review of IEP practice (OFSTED, 1999).

Secondly, it is argued, the IEP itself often has very little impact on the classroom curriculum - in other words it does not lead to the teacher adding an extra level of differentiation to the curriculum but rather a separate element to that child's curriculum (see also Hart, 1998, Chichester, unpublished). This view is lent support in a recent review of the IEP where it was noted that such individual planning and implementation often happens in a vacuum with little consideration given to how such planning may impact on the more general planning of the teacher (OFSTED, 1999, paras. 3 and 4). Two reasons are often given for this. Firstly that the process of the IEP has been grafted onto the existing practices of schools and consequently is viewed as an addition to those practices, rather than being integrated into them (Tod, 1999). Secondly, that in many cases the need to be accountable for what is included in the IEP itself leads the school to separate out what is IEP work and what is classroom curriculum work (Hart, 1992, Cooper, 1996, OFSTED, 1999, para. 39).

Several claims are also made about how effective the IEP process can be in involving parents and children in the discussion about how such needs are to be met. Russell (1994) argues, that with support from the school, the requirement to consult with parents and children will lead to a far higher level of involvement. This, it has been argued, will provide them with a more extensive level of information to base their decision making on (Holden *et al.*, 1993) and allow the parents and child to have a real stake in the decision making process itself (Tod *et al.*, 1998). This involvement is further enhanced by the IEP itself because of the clarity of the language it utilises to set targets (Cooper, 1996).

However, again, several writers have questioned whether these benefits actually occur in practice. Three lines of argument are put forward. Firstly, in a review of what was considered "good practice" across 21 different LEAs by those LEAs Derrington (1996) found that schools tend to view the IEP essentially as a planning tool for the teacher. In effect consultation with the child and parents was still seen as a peripheral aspect of the IEP process.

Secondly, the context in which such consultation takes place is argued to be problematic. The format of a formal review meeting is suggested to be inhibiting for parents and children alike and the lack of knowledge about the underlying principles and the language used in such meetings prevents them from taking a meaningful part in such meetings (Bowers and Wilkinson, 1998, Thomas, 1997).

Thirdly, in reviews of how much involvement was actually occurring in practice there was found to be far less consultation with parents and children than is often stated (Cooper, 1996, Russell, 1997, OFSTED, 1997, paras. 109 and 111). The reason most often given for this lower level of involvement is the pressures of time on teachers and especially in terms of the time taken to complete what the teachers perceive as the necessary paperwork demands of the IEP itself (Bowers and Wilkinson, 1998, OFSTED, 1999, para. 25)

The impacts of ethnicity.

While much of the literature review so far has been concerned with issues that are common to most schools, it is now necessary to look briefly at the impact of the ethnicity of the family and child. Like many schools within the inner-city the school the study is to take place within has a high proportion of children from ethnic minorities (some 90% in this case). Within the school there are a mixture of some first, but mainly second and third generation parents. The majority of children arrive at school using English as a second language although for many it is adequate to make their basic needs known and understood.

(a) the historical legacy - today's legacy.

The reception and treatment of children from ethnic minorities within British schools is well documented by writers such as Sally Tomlinson (Tomlinson, 1984, 1986). While it is important to recognise that there has been much change within the provision of education for ethnic minorities (in particular the disentangling of educational needs from the needs arising from speaking English as a second language and the recognition that teachers hold differing stereotyped views depending on the grouping the child comes from) many parents may have experienced being labelled as deficient because of these confusions (Hall, 1996, and Crooks,

1997). The result of this is often a reluctance on the part of the parents to engage in meaningful partnership because of a lack of trust both in the schools and the staff in the schools (Tomlinson, 1993).

Further, with this mistrust it has been argued that many parents have perceived schools as not just providing a poor deal for their children but as an attack on their culture itself (Houlton, 1986). This may tend to further heighten the mistrust of the motives of the school.

(b) the relationship between home and school cultures - the issue of stereotype and misunderstanding.

Whereas it is obvious to state that where parents do not speak English there is a barrier to understanding because of communication problems much more caution needs to be taken in considering the barrier to understanding that culture plays. In some interesting studies Ghuman (1997) and Houlton (1986) found that children tend to attempt to take the best from each culture they come into contact with. This will tend to lead to a highly diverse range of views and beliefs in multi-ethnic community. This should at least caution the professional against attempting to apply cultural norms to their perspective on their relationships with parents and pupils (Dwivedi, 1996).

However, there is evidence that this very static and stereotyped view is often how professionals do perceive members of ethnic minorities. Fraser (1986) found, in an interesting review of research concerning teacher response to African-Caribbean families, that there was a tendency to consider all the families as one homogenous group and apply the same stereotypes to all. Further, in a study on achievement of ethnic minority pupils (based mainly within secondary schools) there was significant evidence that such stereotyped responses are still strongly held, and widely applied, by staff and professionals in contact with the children (Gillborn and Gipps, 1996). Both studies suggest that the overriding model applied to children from ethnic minorities is one of deficit, particularly with children from an African-Caribbean background. As more anecdotal studies such as Ferris (1997) and Grugeon (1990) show this can lead to a relationship based on increasing misunderstanding of each other's perspectives and an increasing mistrust of each other's motives. Further, in the case of the Ferris report, it also led to an increasing confusion in the child as both children

desperately wanted to fit in with the school and please their teachers but also did not want to go against what they felt were their family's values. This confusion was further heightened by the issue that within their home culture there was an imperative not to criticise, or talk about, a respected adult.

Nor should it be presumed that parents will respond to being told their child has special needs in a stereotypical way. In an interesting study based in America Eaton and Dembo (1997) found some support for the idea that while different communities respond to such news superficially in the same way, within that particular community the underlying feelings and motivations can be radically different. Again, this cautions against a presumed understanding based on a perceived, but deeply stereotyped, wisdom.

Though this is a potentially serious issue for this study three considerations need to be taken into account in the way that the school to be studied does differ from these reports. Firstly, it is a primary school and often the reports do not clearly differentiate between primary and secondary education. Secondly, the majority of the parents in the school speak English at least fairly fluently and have little need for an interpreter. In the more anecdotal reports this was not the case. Thirdly, many of the parents in the reports are first, or second, generation immigrants whereas at the school being studied they are often third generation. They have passed through the British schooling system and have at least some understanding of how it operates. It is uncertain what effect these differences will have on the arguments put forward in the literature.

(c) the assessment of bilingual children - the issue of the use of language in context.

The assessment of children with special needs who are bilingual has long been a cause for concern, especially if the child is assessed purely in English (Hall, 1996). As Shu-Mintula (1995) points out this is not simply a matter of misunderstanding but a failure often to set such assessment within tasks that make cultural sense to the child.

Further, pupils will tend to apply different beliefs and use different languages depending on which they feel is appropriate to the context they are within (Houlton, 1989, Dwivedi, 1996).

This is an important finding if considered in the light of assessment. As Mills and Mills (1995) points out whereas children may see English as the language to use at school they will not be equally proficient in each language that they speak. Indeed, it may well be that such children are more proficient in one language only in certain areas (for example the language of maths - the study of Phillips and Birrell, 1994 is interesting here). Hence, making a more general assessment in one language may present a false picture of the child.

Enhancing the role of the parent or the child.

Within these complex relationships how is it possible to enable the parent or child to have a more meaningful role which allows for genuine involvement in the decision making process ? Most often this is termed "empowerment" in the literature, in that by changing the relationship in some way the non-professional then has the power to interact on a more meaningful basis. A useful definition of the term is given by Wolfendale (1992),

"Empowerment usually refers to the means as well as the ends of realising and expressing wants, needs and rights and ensuring that the parental voice is heard and has influence."

This is not necessarily to say that the professional and non-professional need to have a completely equal role, although some have argued that such equality is essential (Wolfendale, 1997b).

The literature reviewed so far strongly suggests that empowerment will only happen where the underlying perspectives, ability to interact and the underlying structure of the relationship are addressed. In the literature there appear to be several approaches put forward to achieve this - the use of advocacy, skilling the participant themselves and the use of self-advocacy, the use of peer advocacy, redefining the language used to discuss the child's difficulties and redefining the procedures around which the support for the child is given.

However, within this discussion it is important to keep two questions in mind. Firstly, what are the participants being empowered to do ? It is often pointed out (for example, see Vincent, 1996) that the role of empowerment is seen as one which skills the individual to better interact within their own context. This implies that empowerment will usually skill a single individual to operate within a structure over which they still have little power to change at a more fundamental level.

Secondly, how empowered do the participants really want to be ? This is a crucial question, but not one that is often addressed very clearly, or fully, in the literature. There appears to be a presumption that the participants will naturally want to be empowered. Most often, then, the literature addresses how this can be achieved, not whether it is actually wanted or the extent to which it is wanted. However, as Corbett (1996) argues, empowerment means opening yourself and your views up to the scrutiny of a wider audience. Being exposed in this way can be a painful, and isolating, process.

i) Advocacy

Advocacy is a form of empowerment whereby another person represents your views to the professional, or actively supports you in putting forward those views. This can help in at least four ways. Firstly, advocates are usually knowledgeable about the procedures and processes of putting across a point of view and have a greater knowledge of the alternatives available. Secondly, they will usually help represent the views of the parent or child in a form which is possibly more coherent than they could do themselves. Thirdly, they can help act as a buffer between the professional and the parent or child. Advocates used in these ways are often used at the Stage 4 or 5 level of the Code of Practice (Riddell, 1994). Fourthly, because they tend to be nationally or locally organised bodies such organisations often have the ability to lobby for their views at a policy making level and, hence may have influence which extends beyond the individual child (Trier, 1997, Furze and Conrad, 1997).

Such advocacy can have genuine benefits. In an interesting article reviewing the work of a voluntary organisation offering advocacy support in the field of dyslexia, Riddell (1994) found parents felt that such support could help secure additional resources and help achieve what they wanted in the face of reluctant professionals. It also could provide a valuable

source of information upon which to base decisions. As Corbett (1996) notes when minority voices are seeking to be heard they are best heard together putting a single view in an organised, coherent form.

Yet advocacy may also have its limitations. Advocacy is generally offered by specific organisations which are focused on specific disorders or difficulties. Because many are voluntary in nature they tend to focus on those areas where the parents are most vocal and able to organise themselves. Both these considerations will tend to work against inner-city families, with children at the earlier stages of the Code of Practice (Vincent and Tomlinson, 1997). Also, many organisations which offer to act as advocates are of a charitable status and this may be resented by many parents (Garner and Sandow, 1995).

Further, to gain access to these resources there is a tendency to have to accept the label used to define the child's difficulty and the connotations that go with it. Often there is also a tendency to have to accept the agenda that the organisation has in relation to that difficulty (Gasgoine, 1995). In that sense advocacy may be seen as another form of taking power away from the parents or child, but instead of the professional gaining, this time it will be the organisation offering the advocacy (Garner and Sandow, 1995).

ii) Skilling the participant - self-advocacy within the school

If advocacy has its problems what of self-advocacy? This is where the participant represents themselves but often after being skilled in some way to improve their knowledge and ability to put forward their views. In the context of medical assessment Rose *et al.* (1996) considered the possible impacts of such skilling for children. Potentially this would allow the child, or parent, to put forward their own views, at short notice and in a way that allows more genuine interaction with the professional. It would also remove the necessity to rely on the kindness, or charity, of others.

However, Rose also points out the drawbacks of self-advocacy. Firstly, self-advocacy is only as good as the skilling that the child has been given. Rose argues that the skills of negotiation and decision making are key here, and that they need to be inbuilt into the day to day functioning of the child to develop their use. This will be particularly important for young

children where they need considerable practice and familiarity to help them overcome the desire to please the teacher and say what they feel that the teacher wants them to say (Pugh and Selleck, 1997). However, Rose further argues, the school curriculum as it is set up for special needs children often excludes the child from access to these very skills. They are considered "higher order" skills which are an extra to the more basic curriculum considered to be more appropriate to the needs of the special needs child. This point is also raised by Ingram and Worrall (1993) in their exploration of the development of negotiation skills within the primary classroom. However, they suggest that the increased use of circle times within the school curriculum will tend to engender these skills and this is an area that all children tend to be given more equal access to.

Secondly, having all the skills in the world are of little use if the child, or parent, is not able to influence the actual decision making process. In effect, being able to put forward your views more coherently does not necessarily alter the power relationship within the relationship. Unless access is given to have a genuine effect on this process then self-advocacy is likely to have a limited results (Roller, 1998).

iii) Peer advocacy.

Peer advocacy is often suggested as a middle way between advocacy by an organisation and self-advocacy. It is argued to offer the collective strength of a group of like minded people while allowing more freedom for the voice of the participant to be heard. In reviews of Parent Partnership Programmes in this country Trier (1997) and Mallett (1997) found that, for parents, this type of support was felt to be very valuable. They found that it offered parents the opportunity and time to discuss their feelings with others in similar positions. It was also felt to offer a source of information about the process and options available which was understandable (see also Wolfendale, 1997b). It is to be wondered from these studies whether the collective strength of an alliance such as this would have the power to impact upon the actual process rather than to support individuals as they pick their way through the existing system. As such it may be seen to suffer the same potential lack of genuine impact that was outlined earlier (Roller, 1998). However, as long as enough peers are available to work in this way (see Furze and Conrad, 1997 and Trier, 1997 for contrasting experiences of

this) it would appear that peer advocacy can offer valuable support and help enhance the ability of parents to put forward their views in an effective way.

Others have also suggested that peer advocacy is an appropriate strategy to empower the child themselves. However, the concept is a different one in this case. Peers are seen as enablers. Russell (1996b) argues that by allowing peers to become part of the solution to the child's needs strong relationships can be formed which allow the child to make her needs known more readily and confidently. However, other writers are not so sure about the benefits of peer advocacy if the reactions of peers to children with special needs are considered. Vlachou (1997) carried out a study, admittedly small, into this aspect of school children's perceptions. What was found was a strong tendency for the children to categorise the child according to their perceived difficulty and focus on the stereotypical weaknesses that this implied. The result was a desire to help the child, rather than to support them on an equal basis. It should be noted here Vlachou used photographs of two children with Down's Syndrome to prime the discussions that form the basis of the study. It is possible if the "difficulty" was less visual or the two children were actually part of the class the views may have been different.

iv) redefining the language of SEN

If the structure of advocacy, in its various forms, tends to only leave the parent, or child, in a better position to operate within the existing system (valuable as this is) what about altering the existing structure itself? It is argued by some writers that part of this could be achieved by changing the language that is used to discuss the difficulties that children face in school. In essence the argument is that if the underlying philosophy is to be altered then the terminology used to hang that philosophy on will need to be altered to encourage a change in how the area is approached (Solity, 1992).

As has been seen, by talking about the child's special needs the focus tends to be on the individual child and the issues are located within them. Solity (1992) argues that rather than use a model of special needs in which the emphasis is on the more "needy", the focus should be on the duty of the school to meet the needs of all the children in the class. This is

essentially an egalitarian approach, where the focus is shifted from the child to the duty of the teacher.

Yet it is not a call for the area to become based on the rights of the child, as suggested by Rolf and Bines (1994). As Thomas (1997) argues the potential for adversarial conflict within such an approach would tend to destroy the very notions of partnership that are trying to be achieved.

However, it is more than simply redefining the term used to describe special needs (such as is suggested by Ainscow and Muncey, 1989, in their use of the term "meeting individual needs"). There is a shift of emphasis. Instead of the "blame" being focused by the language used on the "weaker" participant the focus would be on the "stronger" participant and what they are going to do to meet the needs of all the class. Thomas (1997) argues that what is seen as a "special need" is often a lack of opportunity on the part of the child combined with the situation that they are learning within. As Ainscow (1997) argues, what children at the school based stages of the Code of Practice may require is not a specialised, separate, and isolating, programme of work, but rather a skilfully differentiated curriculum which is available to all. As such, new terminology could facilitate a movement in thinking to allow there to be a movement from an "in-child" view of special needs to an approach which views such children as children whom the teacher finds difficulty teaching in some way (Gross, 1996).

However, some have argued that simply changing the language used to meet the needs of these children will cause little real change in the underlying meaning of whatever terminology is used. Corbett (1996) argues, that the dominant existing language is often too powerful not to have a major modifying effect on the new language. This will be especially so where the powerful professional is steeped in the older, existing language. New terminology may become the vogue, but its meaning in practice may not change in any dramatic way. Deconstruction of the old language, as Corbett suggests, may be needed to make way for the full effect of new language to take place. With such language so ingrained in the thinking of the professional this may be a very difficult objective to realise in practice.

Further, there is some evidence that the use of language which focuses on difference and the needs of individuals is simply the way that people think. As such, moving away from an "in-child" form of categorisation may only lead to a further "within-school" categorisation which in practice may still separate the child from their class (Thomas, 1997). People think in terms of categories and need this form of separation by grouping to make sense of the information presented to them (Feiler and Gibson, 1999). In any case, as Norwich (1999) argues, even if new, more positive language is adopted there is no guarantee that such language will retain its positive connotations over time.

v) Redefining the procedures.

Several suggestions have been put forward concerning how the IEP process may be better used to encourage, and increase, the level of parental and child involvement in deciding what those needs are and how they are to be met. Essentially they fall into two broad groupings:

(a) Firstly, it is argued, that a separation needs to be made between the IEP as a planning tool and the IEP as a record of intention for which the school can be held accountable (Hart, 1998) As OFSTED (1999, para. 39) found the need to be accountable tends to distract teachers from the use of the IEP as a working document in which different approaches can be tried and rapid change adapted to. It is also argued by Hart (1990) that by separating the two functions of the IEP and integrating the accountability aspects of the IEP into the general record keeping policy of the school there would be less tendency for teachers to focus on targets which were easily measurable. This would allow a more holistic approach to be taken toward the child and this is the type of approach which more easily allows the involvement of the parent and child. However, it has to be recognised that while LEAs continue to insist on IEPs being used for accountability, or audit, purposes (OFSTED, 1999, paras. 92-3) this will be extremely difficult to achieve.

(b) Secondly, that there needs to be a concerted effort by schools to integrate the IEP process within the general curriculum planning of the school. (Tod, 1999, Hart, 1992, Carpenter, 1997). This, it is argued, would have two effects. Firstly, it would allow the IEP to be seen as an additional level of differentiation within the classroom rather than focusing on the individual needs of a specific child which, as was seen earlier, tends to lead to a separate

programme of work for that child. Secondly, it would remove the tendency to view the special needs child as the domain of the specialist. This would allow the teacher to view the need to involve the parent and child at the same level as the other children in the class, rather than feeling that such decision making is outside the experience of them because of the need for specialist knowledge and skills. However, it has been argued by other writers that not all needs can be met effectively by this approach and some needs may still require specialist advice and targeting even at the early stages of the Code of Practice (Gross, 1996, Wilson, 1999).

Conclusions.

This chapter has explored much of the literature relating to developing genuinely involving relationships between the teacher and the child, and the teacher and the parents. It has attempted to blend together the literature relating to the everyday home and school relationships and the literature relating to children who are considered to have special needs.

What has been seen is that the relationships are complex ones and that there is much debate about how, and why, they tend to develop in the ways that they do and how to achieve a more genuine involvement both for the child and their parents. Many of the models and explanations explored are useful in exploring these relationships within a school such as the one in which I work. However, they do also appear to have some limitations. Some of these possible limitations are:

- (a) it can be difficult to disentangle the primary age analysis from that of the secondary, or tertiary, age data,
- (b) much of the research relates to children who already hold a statement of special educational need, rather than the earlier school based stages of the Code of Practice,
- (c) the professional that the study relates to is not the teacher, but rather a professional who works outside the school context,

(d) the relationships have often developed exclusively in the more formal context of annual reviews, formal meetings or interviews,

(e) the studies are often very general in terms of location, or multi-site studies where the conclusions are not clearly separated out in relation to those locations, and,

(f) the studies often do not take place within the multi-ethnic community that I teach within or this aspect of the study is not defined very clearly.

What appears to be needed to give a balance to the literature is a study which specifically focuses on the small primary school, and allows such influences as the impact of ethnicity to be considered. In this sense this review has pointed to the need for a study such as this one if the principles and ideas contained within the current literature are to be applied to my own context in a considered way. It is to this specific, and tightly focused, study that it is now time to turn.

Chapter 3 - The Design and Methodology of the Study.

Introduction.

This chapter describes the design and methodology that underlies this study. It begins with the premise that the selection of these should be dictated solely by the types of data required to answer the research questions set by the study, and by the constraints that the researcher works within. These needs and constraints are outlined.

The over-all design of the research process is then outlined and a rationale given for working in this way. A brief literature review is used to select a suitable methodology to fulfil this design. Criteria are also suggested against which to judge the procedures followed and quality of the data collected. The chapter then examines the details of how I actually carried out the study. It describes, in detail how, and why, the data was collected and analysed in the way that it was. The chapter finishes with a detailed description of the school in which the study took place, to allow the comparison process so crucial to the possible wider applicability of small, qualitative pieces of research.

The design of the study.

In attempting to develop a suitable design for the study one question was of over-riding importance. What type of data was necessary to meaningfully answer the research questions ? Essentially what was required was to peer beneath the veneer of what happened, to the layer of perspective. It was not enough simply to describe and interpret. Rather, there was a need to understand each interaction from the point of view of the participants. It is these underlying perspectives that define the ways in which the participants respond and interact within the relationship. This implied the need for a rich depth to the data collected with the focus to be on eliciting the underlying perspectives of the participants to those relationships in detail.

However, simply exploring these perspectives in general would not be sufficient to provide answers to the research questions. Relationships develop within a network of interaction

which is specific to that particular set of relationships. It was crucial then not only to explore the perspectives held but also to explore the understanding of each relationship from the perspective of each of the participants to that relationship. This should provide answers at a deeper level. It would suggest not only what perspectives were held but how, and why, they resulted in the relationship that existed at the time of the study.

This implied that each grouping of relationships surrounding a particular child would need to be explored as a whole. In essence this grouping formed a network of participants which focused on the child considered to be experiencing special needs. This grouping typically consisted of the child themselves, her parents or carers, and the school professional involved with the child (typically this would be the child's teacher, but could also include a classroom assistant, or possibly the SENCo). This crucial ingredient of focusing on the network of relationships surrounding specific children had far reaching implications when considering the sample chosen for the study.

Finally, such relationships are inevitably influenced by the philosophy and procedures which underlie the context within which they take place, both at a school and wider level. This implied that the underlying influences and constraints imposed by the special needs process would have to be capable of being taken into account by the data collection process.

However, there were also contextual constraints that needed to be considered as well. Essentially these were threefold. Firstly, I had access to only a single setting to carry the study out within - the school that I teach within. Secondly, because I am a teacher at that school I would be an insider exploring a setting which I had an intimate knowledge of. Thirdly, as a teacher I did not have the ability to free myself from my role as a classroom teacher on demand - I would not be able to sit in and observe meetings and conversations as they occurred on a day to day basis.

So how could the type of data to be collected be blended with the contextual constraints that I worked within to produce a suitable design? A comparison of two studies using very different approaches was helpful here. Both had the same aim - an attempt to gain the perspectives of students with special needs about their needs and the ways in which these needs were being met. The first was Wade and Moore (1994), a study concerning 161

students using a quantitative methodology of questionnaires and sentence completion tasks. The second was Tisdall and Dawson (1994), a study concerning 21 students using a qualitative methodology of semi-structured interviews to attempt to elicit the perspectives of the interviewees on what was happening to them.

What was important here was the type of data provided by each study. The first certainly provided a lot of interesting data. However, what was obvious from a careful reading of the study was that both the agenda of the areas of information requested and the interpretation of the answers provided were controlled by the researchers themselves. The respondents were constrained both in terms of the subjects they could address and the explanations for their answers. In essence the study provided detailed answers to questions of "what" the respondents thought. However it could only speculate, albeit in an intelligent way, as to why they held these views. It explored the surface, rather than the depth of the respondents' perceptions.

The second study provided a lot less data. However, what emerged from the study was that through the interviews the students could develop their own ideas and explain them from their own perspective. While it is not presumed that even such a process as this is agenda free on the part of the researcher (they did ask questions and direct the conversation at times), what was allowed to emerge was something of the individual voice of each student and their own perspectives.

The reflections of the researchers of two further major studies were also helpful. Tizard and Hughes (1991), reflecting on their study concerning young children's language usage, argue that they felt that their switch to a qualitative form of data analysis from their original quantitative analysis resulted in analysis which allowed greater depth and richness of data. It also allowed the emergence of themes other than those that were expected prior to the study.

Secondly, Ghaill (1991) argues that the use of an indepth, qualitative approach to his research, in his essentially ethnographic study, was essential to allow the complexity of the patterns of interaction and context to emerge. It also allowed the students to explain such interaction from their point of view, rather than the researcher having to attempt to infer

these underlying perspectives. This allowed more unexpected perspectives to be put forward by the students.

To achieve such depth, then, there was a need to focus on the small and the detailed rather than the more broad and general. Focus on a single setting allowed me to do this. This was further added to by the intimate detail that I would have of that setting as an insider. As such, what might on the surface appear constraints actually became central ingredients of the study.

Secondly, if the key focus of the study was to elicit the underlying perspectives of the participants to the relationship this could only be done by entering into a dialogue which allows them to put forward these perspectives in a detailed, and honest, way. Consequently while observation may be useful what was key was the process of dialogue through a series of interviews and more informal discussions. This could be carried out at any time that was convenient to the interviewer and interviewee and would not require me to be released from class to observe meetings on a day to day basis. Considerations of the type of interview to use will be addressed in the next section.

In summary, then, the design decided upon was a qualitative one. It focused on a thick description of a small set of samples within a single setting with myself working as an insider researcher within my own working context. The data collection was to be primarily made by a process of interview and discussion. The sample selected was to focus on specific groupings of participants that surrounded specific children considered to be experiencing special needs. The analysis of the data was to have a dual focus. Firstly, it was to elicit the perspectives of the participants to the relationships to be studied. These could then be grouped according to the role of the participant (whether they were teachers, parents, or the children themselves). Secondly, it would consider the perspectives of the participants to relationships surrounding individual children. This would provide analysis of the ways in which specific patterns of interaction had led to a specific relationship. Taken together it was hoped that such analysis would provide a rich depth upon which to propose answers to the research questions posed by the study.

The methodology of the study.

In terms of the methodology of the study the key decision taken was concerned with the type of interview process to use to elicit the perspectives of the interviewees. Four considerations rapidly became evident in considering this crucial decision. Specifically, the interview process would need to:

- (a) enable the different perspectives of the teachers, parents and pupils to be explored in depth,
- (b) be able to cope with possible complexity and disparity in the participants' perspectives,
- (c) allow for unexpected, or "fringe", issues to emerge and be explored,
- (d) enable, as far as was realistically possible, the participants to have the trust and freedom to put forward their perspectives with honesty.

In addition to this, a criticism made by the studies noted earlier in the literature review was that parents were often expected to respond to important questions and issues without any prior warning. The result was too often a silence (often interpreted as agreement to the questioners thoughts), confusion or a snap answer, rather than a considered, thought out one (Armstrong and Galloway, 1992, Armstrong, 1995, and Knill and Humphreys, 1996).

The suggestion, then, was that if I was to gain data which was honest and in depth there was a need to find a technique which allowed the interviewees to feel at ease and to develop their own ideas in an atmosphere of trust (both in terms of my response and confidentiality).

In her work concerning understanding the perspectives of secondary school students of their response to her drama classes McHardy (1996) used a technique of "interview conversations". These consisted of interviews which were very informal and focused on the interview as a discussion of views and ideas, rather than the more formal technique of question and answer. McHardy had a series of areas that she wished to explore but used these to guide the discussion rather than a set of discrete areas to question the interviewee on. Within this she also extensively used a technique that she refers to as "summarising" - that is attempting to reflect back to the interviewee a summary of what has been discussed to allow

further refining and depth to be added to the views given. This process was two way, with McHardy being willing to provide her ideas and knowledge to the students rather than the interviewer solely eliciting information from the interviewee. This, McHardy believed, helped to develop the level of trust within the interview.

In my situation this seemed an ideal approach to use. It offered the level of informality that would help put the interviewees more at their ease and a movement away from the more formal interview process that both parents and children appeared to find so uncomfortable and constraining within the literature. Tantalisingly, it also suggested a way in which to add greater depth to the data provided. Further, by using areas that I wished to discuss as a guide only within the interview there was the opportunity for the interviewee to have some control over the direction of the interview. This suggested that more disparate, or unexpected, perspectives were much more likely to emerge. The approach also provided something that I as an researcher felt was important on a personal level - a structure within which to give something back to the interviewee rather than the information flowing in one direction only.

Within this approach, however, two issues concerned me. Firstly, the literature also suggested that often the lack of response, or depth of response, was due to a lack of time for the interviewees to think through their answers and give a measured response. Secondly, and more practically, I was concerned that even this approach might provide a beginning to the interviews which could cause the parents and children to feel unsure of themselves in my presence as a teacher within the school. To alleviate these potential problems I decided to provide each interviewee with advanced warning of what might be discussed in the interview and to provide a simple structure at the start of each interview which would hopefully provide "pegs" on which to hang subsequent comments and views. These are discussed in detail later in the section.

A second key decision in terms of methodology was my approach to the concept of "validity" within the study. While I had decided to use a qualitative approach I was also aware that criticism has often followed this approach. At base these are usually of two, interlinked, types. The first relates to the issue of validity, and the second to the notion of an insider reflecting on their own context (for example see Hammersley, 1993).

For the insider-researcher validity is a complex subject. The aim of much qualitative work is to gain a deep understanding of the situation under exploration. However, an equally pressing aim is to make a distance between the researcher and the context that they work within and not presume that the understanding they already have is necessarily a valid one. Therefore, a large part of ensuring the "validity" of the study is to ensure that the study is sufficiently rigorous in its design to help maintain this distance. It is important, then, that while the approach may be one based on reflection the overall design of the study is one that is deliberate and systematic.

The work of Anderson *et al.* (1994) was of great help here. In a helpful discussion of practitioner research and the issue of internal validity they suggest a series of criteria to help ensure this deliberate and systematic approach. They are:

- (a) the process of information gathering and analysis must be open and scrupulously applied,
- (b) the data gathered and inferences made must be open to scrutiny and comment by others,
- (c) the researcher must be open to changing their own initial views.

In other words, the deeper understanding provided by the study should challenge the researcher's existing views. If it does not then it has to be asked whether valid inferences are being drawn or whether the data is being skewed to perpetuate a "pet" theory or concept.

In terms of external validity Anderson *et al.* (1994) follow the argument of Schofield (1989), in that they argue against seeking to make such research "generalisable" *per se*. Rather they suggest the use of a "thick description" to allow comparison between the study context and the context where the study is seeking to be applied. Given the single site nature of this study this approach seemed to be an eminently sensible one to follow.

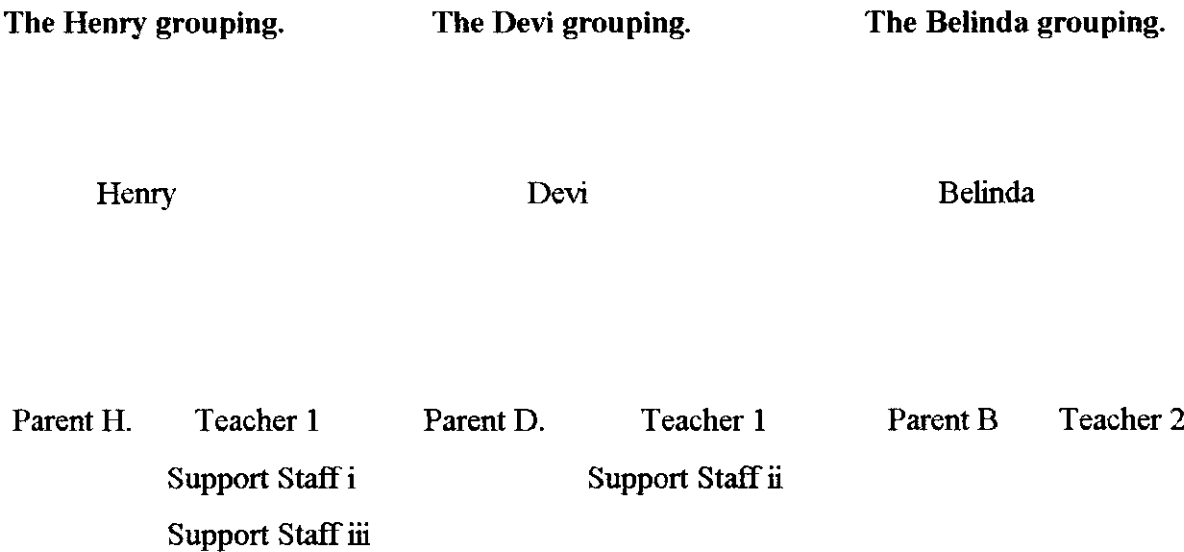
The detail of the methodology - what I actually did.

Having outlined the "barebones" of the design and methodology chosen it is now necessary to describe in some detail what was actually done, as well as some of the reasons why the research was eventually carried out in the form that it was.

The sample - the selection of the groupings.

The data collection process took place over the period of just over a year, from April 1998 to April 1999. The initial aim was to interview one grouping of relationships relating to a specific child a month, to make the workload manageable. Each grouping consisted typically of the child, a parent, his, or her, classroom teacher and any support staff that the child worked with as part of their Individual Education Plan.

Figure 3.1 -Diagram showing the groupings for three children



The sample was selected to attempt to reflect the spread of children who were considered to have special educational needs throughout the school (see Figure 3.4). While the sample was not highly structured it seemed important to take into account the gender, ethnicity and age of the children within that group of children. Whilst this approach guided the type of child

chosen it proved difficult to keep to the initial sample chosen at the outset of the data collection, given the mobility of the school population. However, the eventual sample does broadly reflect the variety of children within the grouping of children with special needs within the school at that time.

Further, it seemed important to me that the final sample also reflected a wide range of parents. What I mean by this is that the sample should also attempt to reflect the broad variety of parents within the school. I felt that it was particularly important to attempt to include those who were not only those fully involved in school life, but those who were also seen to be detached in some way. There is a great temptation within a project such as this to focus on the easy to approach and talk to. However, this would not reflect the parental population of the school. Human nature being what it is I felt that if I based the sample purely on a random or opportunistic one I would be prone to end up with a sample which reflected simply those parents, or children, that I felt comfortable with. Consequently, I deliberately included groupings where parents either spoke little or no English or had very minimal involvement in school (in terms of attending meetings, parents' evenings, collecting their children from school *etc.*).

While these considerations meant that the sample was effectively chosen rather than random, I believed that it was likely to more fully reflect the wider range of the school population. Within these very general guiding criteria, however, the actual groupings eventually used were still partially selected by opportunity and those who were willing to take part in the study.

Because the sample was to include those who rarely came into school parents were asked to take part in the study by way of letter initially. This described the purposes of the study and sought a reply to signify interest in being part of the study. When this was gained a face to face meeting, or a telephone call, took place to arrange consent to include both the parent and child within the study, as well as a time and place to meet. It was at this time that the "advanced warning " of what was to be discussed (outlined below) was given. Only one parent declined the request to be involved in the study. No reason was given. One other parent agreed to become involved but later proved unable to arrange a time to be interviewed. The reason subsequently given was that of long working hours.

Figure 3.2 - Table showing level of parental involvement in school of the sample.

Name of parent	Child	Very involved	Little involved	Not involved	English as 2nd language.
A	Adam	*			
B	Belinda	*			
C	Chandani		*		*
D	Devi	*			*
E	Eddy			*	
F	Fiona		*		
H	Henry	*			
J	John		*		*
G (declined interview)	Greta			*	

The final sample for the project consisted of nine groupings of interviewees. In addition to this the SENCo was interviewed, as were, more informally, key outside professionals such as the Educational Psychologist. A full list of the complete sample can be found below (see Figure 3.3)

As far as was possible each grouping was approached one at a time and each member of that grouping interviewed before moving on to the next. In practice this rarely occurred perfectly but interviews within the groupings took place as close together as circumstances allowed. The reasons for this lack of success in timing are discussed later.

The rationale for using this approach needs some explanation, given that the data collection took place over the period of a year. Perhaps normally it would have been ideal to interview all the teachers, for example, in a short period of time, to minimise the effect of developing professional practice on perspectives. However, at the outset it was clear that allowance would need to be made for the high mobility of the school's population. Consequently, if I were to interview each category of interviewee before moving onto the next category over the

period of a year it was highly likely that several groupings would have remained incomplete. This would have frustrated the fundamental aim of the project which was to understand the relationships formed from the point of view of all the participants to a specific relationship.

Figure 3.3 - Table showing study sample.

Child	Age	Stage (Type)	Ethnicity	Parent	Teacher	Support Staff.
Adam	6	2 (General)	White	Mother (A)	1	
Belinda	7	3 (EBD)	Mixed Race	Mother (B)	2	i
Chandani	8	1 (Literacy)	Indian	Mother (C)	3\4	
Devi	8	1 (Literacy)	Pakistani	Mother (D)	1	
Eddy	9	3 (General/EBD)	White	Father (E)	1	i
Fiona	9	1 (General)	African Caribbean	Mother (F)	1	i\ii
Greta	9	2 (EBD)	African Caribbean		5	ii
Henry	10	3 (Specific)	African Caribbean	Mother (H)	1	ii / iii
John	11	3 (Specific)	African Caribbean	Mother (J)	6	iii

Also interviewed - SENCo (also Deputy Head)

Informally "interviewed" - I (Educational Psychologist)

R (Pupil Support Service - Literacy)

(Note: Categories of type of need as defined by Birmingham Audit of Special needs, 1999).

Figure 3.4 - Tables showing potential sample of children within school - April 98 to April 99.

Number of the children on Stages of Code of Practice.

Year Grouping	Stage of Code of Practice				
	1	2	3	4	5
YR	0	0	0	0	0
Y1	4	1	0	0	0
Y2	1	1	1	0	1
Y3	0	0	3	0	1
Y4	1	2	2	0	1
Y5	2	6	2	0	0
Y6	1	3	1	0	1

Total number of children on Register : 35.

Gender : 19 boys, 16 girls.

Ethnicity of children on Stages of Code of Practice.

White	8
Black African	1
Black Caribbean	11
Black other	0
Indian	2
Pakistani	6
Bangladeshi	2
Chinese \ Vietnamese	1
Other	2

(Source : Special Needs Audit Return, 1999)

In essence, then, a pragmatic decision was taken to ensure the type of data that was required could be collected. This was also helped by the fact that I knew from the school's Development Plan that no significant professional training would be given concerning special educational needs during that year. Further, the SENCo felt, at the time, that it was highly unlikely that any significant changes in procedure or practice would be implemented while I collected my data.

In reality, by the end of the year of the data collection more than half of the children within the sample no longer attended the school. Further, with the implementation of the National Literacy Strategy (1998) dominating the school agenda that year, and concerns about the then imminent National Numeracy Strategy (1999) and National Grid for Learning rising to the surface, the way that the school approached the issues of special needs remained unaltered in any significant way during that year.

The following table is a timeline of the interviews carried out. The names of the interviewees are listed in the order in which I carried out the interviews within each month.

Figure 3.5 - Table showing timing of Interviews (April 98 to April 99)

Month of interview	People interviewed (in order of interview)					
April						
May	Parent J	Parent F				
June	Teacher 1 (Chandani)	Teacher 6 (John)	Parent E	Teacher 1 (Eddy)		
July	Eddy	Devi	Teacher 1 (Fiona)	Henry	Teacher 1 (Henry)	
August						
September						
October						
November	Parent H	Adam	Parent A	Parent B		
December	Parent D	Fiona	Greta	Teacher 5 (Greta)	Teacher 2 (Belinda)	

January	Belinda	Chandani	Teacher 3 <i>(Devi)</i>	Parent C	Teacher 4 <i>(Devi)</i>
February	Classroom Assistant i	Classroom Assistant ii			
March	SENCo				
April	Classroom Assistant iii				

(Note : no interviews took place from August to October due to the school's summer holiday and the need to settle my new Reception class)

How the data was collected.

The data for the study was collected primarily from the interviewing process. I have already described the technique used in some detail above. Typically each interview took about thirty to forty five minutes to complete. Each interview was recorded onto audio tape. This allowed me to focus solely on the conversation taking place without having to take notes.

Each interview took a similar format. Firstly there was a settling in period in which I attempted to put the interviewee at ease. It was during this time that I explained again the purpose of the interview, the way in which data would be treated and gave reassurances about the confidentiality of the conversation that was to take place.

Secondly, there was the substantive interview. This generally began with some scene setting questions (for example, in the case of the teachers how long they had been teaching the child and in the case of the parents some information about their background). This was followed by what I referred to with the interviewees as "the game" (for a full description see later). The substantive discussion of the interview then developed from the results of the "game". Whilst I had some broad areas that I wished to discuss at this stage of the interview these were used only to move the discussion along when the interviewee appeared to need a new area to discuss or explore. In reality each interview tended to cover comparative areas but the time spent on each area and how each area was interpreted by the interviewee varied.

A third stage was reached at the end of the interview when I asked each interviewee for feedback on the interview process itself. I deliberately turned the tape recorder off at this stage, as a visual indication that the interview was over. I hoped that this would enable the interviewee to reflect freely on the process.

A further stage took place about a week later when I briefly discussed the interview more informally with the interviewee. This, it was hoped, would allow me to gain clarification of some points of the interview but also to make some, albeit brief, judgement about whether the views given were consistently held. This process was repeated at later times if I felt the need arose.

During this process the child's IEP was collected, as a further source of information. This document provided information of two types. Firstly, information about the areas of concern and the ways in which attempts were being made to address these concerns. Secondly, the comments of the parent and child at each review of the IEP, if any, as recorded by the class teacher. More general contextual information was also collected at this stage, including the school and Local Education Authority documentation relating to SEN.

The context of the interviews.

The interviews took place within a context the interviewee themselves chose and care was taken to ensure that they felt comfortable with the location before the interview began. The majority of interviews took place at the end of the school day and in school. The exceptions to this were two interviews with parents, which took place in their own homes (Parent E. and Parent J.).

Because parents were unwilling to wait for their children to be interviewed after school, the interviews with the children were fitted into any free timeslots that I could manage to arrange during the school day in terms of non-contact time. In practice this resulted in the children's interviews often happening at very different times from either the parent's or the teacher's interviews.

Translation facilities were always offered (both at the time of the initial gaining of consent and at the start of each interview) and were made available whenever they were felt to be needed by the parents. Only one parent requested such facilities (Parent C.).

The use of "advance warning" of the direction of the interview.

To allow the interview to be guided by the interviewee it appeared important to me that the interviewee be given an opportunity to consider their own views and organise their thoughts in preparation for the interview.

To aid this prior reflection and organisation of thoughts, advanced "warning" of the areas of interest was verbally given to the interviewee to consider some time before the interview.

This was typically when the interviews were arranged a week or two before they took place. The information given was general in nature - that I was interested in how they think their child, pupil or they themselves were doing at school, the things they think they find easy or difficult at school and the types of contact they had with staff at school.

The use of a "game" as an aid to discussion.

While great care was taken over the context and the tone of the interview I felt that it was also important to give the interviewee a starting point to the conversation over which they had control. I referred to this with the interviewees as "the game". The aim was to provide a simple framework for the beginning of the substantive section of the interview which the interviewees could feel they could tackle successfully, and hence aid confidence. With confidence, I reasoned, would come a greater willingness to be more open in their answers. The simplest aspect of the interview was to focus on the "what" aspect of the interview - what do they think that the child finds easy or has difficulty with in school ?

To achieve this I used a simple card "game" focusing on what the interviewee believed the child found most easy or difficult at school. I used the same set of cards for all the interviewees. On the cards were written things that the child was commonly required to do at

school. The cards covered both subject and behavioural aspects of school. Specifically these were:

Figure 3.6 - The labels used on the cards for the "game".

Writing, spelling, reading, being quiet in class, concentrating in class, keeping your temper, understanding what the teacher says, singing, being good in class, working with other children, finding out things, playing in the playground, science, making things, helping others, asking for help, doing maths (sums).

The interviewee was required to sort the cards into three discrete categories. Two categories were provided for whether they believed the child found the aspects especially easy or difficult at school. A third category was provided to allow for aspects which the interviewee was unsure about. Interviewees were encouraged to consider their choices again when they had completed the task to make alterations in light of their thoughts during the task itself. There was also active encouragement for the interviewees to add cards if they so wished.

Substantive discussion could then take place during this "game" or as a result of it, depending on how the interviewee themselves approached the task. Both the "easy" and the "difficult" piles of cards were discussed and formed the basis of the deeper discussion of their perceptions of the reasons for the child's difficulties and the relationship with other members of the grouping.

While, to myself as the interviewer, this "game" was little more than a simple checklist to narrow down the aspects of school life that the child in question found difficult, it was hoped that to the interviewees it would provide a supportive framework within which to begin to form a series of discussion points around which they could order their later answers .

The Use of a Critical Friend.

To ensure that the criteria set out above to help ensure the internal validity of the study were met a key aspect of the study was the use of a "critical friend". This person was asked to judge whether procedures were being followed and trustworthy inferences being drawn by

having access to the transcriptions of the interviews. Because of the very specific context of the study, and the need for confidentiality, it appeared sensible to ensure that this person was outside of the context of the study school. However, this meant that this person would have little knowledge and understanding of the school. Again a pragmatic decision was reached. While the detailed checking and discussion concerning the procedures and inferences drawn from particular interviews was left to an outsider "friend", I also asked a member of staff to act as a "friend" on more general and factual issues.

The outsider friend also offered to act as a translator for any Punjabi speaking parents who required this service. While only one parent did request such help, this interview provided a natural context in which to allow the "friend" to observe the interview process. This provided a further form of scrutiny of the interview process.

Transcription and analysis of the interviews.

The interviews were recorded onto audio tape. When each interview had taken place a full transcription was made as soon as was possible afterwards. This allowed notes to be added while the interview was fresh in my mind. These covered such issues as changes in emotional response, body language, pace of speech *etc.* during the interview. I also made notes on the interview process itself, because I believe these provide context and a form of self-reflection on the process for me.

Once transcribed and annotated I examined each interview in isolation. No prior coding system was used. I felt this may cause "fringe" issues (often very important to the interviewee) to be neglected. Themes were drawn out from each. In addition to the themes that emerged from the content of the text markers such as mood, voice tone, pace of speech, laughter were noted. Such markers added an extra layer of meaning to the words themselves.

I felt that three questions were vital throughout this process:

- (a) Did the person understand what was being asked ?
- (b) Is the person giving an honest answer, or an answer that they think I want to hear ?
- (c) What did the person really say, as opposed to what I think they might have meant ?

Particularly important here were issues such as comments which were critical of the school, or myself, and corrections when I reflect their views back to the interviewees during the interview.

The analysis of the data took two distinct forms. The first was the comparison of the groups of interviews (such as all the teacher interviews). The primary aim of this was to focus on the perspectives of the different groups. This allowed me to draw out general themes within the groups of interviews. However, it also allowed me to contrast the different perspectives and relate the underlying perspectives of the interviewee to the way in which they perceived the relationship itself.

The second was the comparison of the interviews within specific groupings. The focus here was to attempt to understand how the perspectives and actions of the participants within the grouping intertwined to produce the relationship that it did. This then allowed me to draw out the possible key factors which led to the relationships being effective, or ineffective, in the planning and implementation of additional help for the child within that particular grouping.

The result of this two-fold approach was to enable me to develop general themes in terms of the perspectives of the interviewees and then to be able to explore how these work out in a practical, but specific, relationship. This, it was hoped, would allow me both to extricate what perceptions were held in common by, for example, the parents but at the same time not lose the complexity of the way in which these perspectives work in practice.

The transcripts were then returned to to consider the third research question of the study - concerning the effect of the structure and process of the IEP on the relationships. Passages of conversation relating to this planning and implementation process were drawn out of each interview. Further passages were drawn out which reflected in some way on the underlying structure of the way in which the participants to the relationship recorded this process. These were added to the IEPs that had been collected as part of the data collection process (described earlier). Analysis of this data then allowed me to arrive at some possible conclusions concerning the effect of the specific element of the IEP on the relationships. This was further enhanced by comparison of these conclusions with the guidance given to the school concerning the use of the IEP.

Description of the school.

The school which is the focus of the study is a small, one form entry primary school within the inner city of Birmingham. It has some 160 children on roll. It is housed within a recently refurbished Victorian building with a central hall area and seven small classrooms surrounding the hall. The local area is mainly made up of housing association and council housing, with some owner occupier housing. Some regeneration is beginning to take place with brown field sites being freed up for additional housing. Unemployment is high and there is an uptake of some 42% of free school meals within the school. Many more are entitled, but prefer, through choice, to bring sandwiches for lunch.

The area is one of high population mobility. Families tend to live in the area either as a place of last resort, or until they become more affluent and move to a more "desirable" area. The local population is highly diverse. There are significant numbers of families from many cultures and faiths. At present there are families who attend the school whose families originate from India (41%), Pakistan (12%), Bangladesh (6%), the Caribbean (20%), Vietnam (3%), Somalia (1%), Denmark (1%), Germany (1%), Netherlands (1%), Kenya (3%), the Gambia (1%), as well as indigenous white European families (10%). The majority of families are second generation but a significant minority are first generation families. As such while most families have family members who speak English as a second language , there are still a number who speak very limited English and require access to translation facilities (some 15%). Within the school the typical mobility within the lifetime of a class (from Reception to Year 6) is some 43%, with often the more "able" moving out of the area as their family circumstances allow.

Historically the school is not the first choice of parents within the area. However, with a change of Headteacher, this has begun to change recently with more parents actively choosing for their children to attend the school. Because the school is perceived to work well with children considered to have special needs (both by parents and the Local Authority) the school has also begun to attract a larger proportion of children who are experiencing difficulties than might normally be expected. As such, a significant number of the children

who join the school, particularly in Key Stage 2, have existing learning or behavioural difficulties.

To this end the school was recently given funding to provide additional support staff to develop and run a behaviour nurture group (1998 until 2000). Additional funding was also provided by the Local Authority to run a project to explore the use of learning support assistants to implement children's IEPs (1997 to 2000).

The school is staffed by seven teachers (including a teaching Deputy Head) and a Headteacher. All of the staff at the time of the study were at the top of the pay scale and ranged in age from 35 to 58 years. Only one member of the staff had been qualified for less than 10 years, with a majority having qualified over 15 years ago. The SENCo has received some training in the area of special needs. However, this was mainly in terms of the administrative duties of the SENCo, how to write IEPs and correctly refer children either to outside agencies or for statementing. The training concerning the formation of IEPs was cascaded down to the teaching staff and formed the only formal, specific training the staff had received in the past four years concerning providing for the needs of children who were considered to have special needs. Like many small primary schools of this type non-contact time is relatively rare and no weekly provision is made for classroom teachers.

There are also two full time classroom assistants (one trained to National Vocational Level 3 [NVQ3] standard and one unqualified), two temporary classroom assistants (both trained to NVQ3 standard) and three part time integration assistants (one has an NVQ3 in child care and one is unqualified). No members of the support staff have specific special needs training or qualifications. However, most have several years' practical experience of working with children who find learning difficult.

At the beginning of the study the Deputy Head was also the SENCo. He was given one half day per week non-contact time to carry out this role. In 1999 I was asked to take on this role, as the Deputy was successful in gaining a Headship in a local school.

The number of children on the special needs register remained fairly stable over the period of the study. At the beginning of the study there were 32 children on the SEN register with 1

child holding a statement. At the end of the study there were 38 children on the register, with 4 children holding a statement. The children on the register were, and are, predominantly within Key Stage 2 with the needs being a wide range of learning, specific learning difficulties or behavioural difficulties. Those children on the SEN register at Key Stage 1 are mainly on the earlier stages of the Code of Practice (Stages 1 and 2). However, due to the population mobility the actual children changed dramatically. For example out of the nine children who form the sample of this study 4 are still attending the school at the end of the study. Of the other 5 three children have progressed to secondary school and two have changed school (one by parental choice and the other by way of being taken into care and moving to another area of the city).

Provision for children considered to have special needs is predominantly the responsibility of the class teacher within the school, with the SENCo having an advisory role. This role increases as the child moves further through the stages of the Code of Practice. IEPs are reviewed and written by the class teacher. This is done once a term and one half day non-contact time is nominally provided to do this. The rationale behind this is that if the IEP is to be implemented then it is the class teacher who is in the best position to be able to plan for the needs of the children within the class. They are also perceived to be most freely able to consult with parents. Parental views are mainly sought at parents' evenings, or more informally at the classroom door.

The use of classroom and learning support assistants within the school is generally driven by the need to provide additional help to children with special needs. Consequently, the majority of IEPs, while planned by the class teacher, are implemented by such staff. This was a decision made by the senior management team of the school, in consultation with the teaching and support staff more generally.

The school has access to a variety of agencies. These include Pupil and Schools Support (literacy), Behaviour Support, Educational Psychology, Speech and Language (speech therapy), the Visiting Teacher Service (specific learning and language processing disorders) and health professionals. Such access is generally only available for children at Stage 3 or above of the Code of Practice, as an additional charge is made to provide advice for children at Stages 1 or 2. Even at Stage 3 support provided may only take the form of assessment of

the child and a short, time limited package to provide further advice to the teacher or work with the child themselves. Recently the school has also begun to forge links with local Special Schools and access their knowledge and skills.

Chapter 4 - Analysis of the Research Data.

Introduction.

The purpose of this chapter is to explore the data collected by the interview process and draw out the underlying and common themes running through that data. What is aimed at is not simply a detailed description, but rather an understanding of each relationship through the perceptions of the participants to it (either the teacher and parent, or the teacher and child). Each relationship will be explored in turn, and a process of comparison and contrast will be used to explore the differences that exist between the participants.

Secondly, this chapter will consider the effects of the additional process of deciding what each child's needs are and how these can best be met and how this process impacts in this situation on the two relationships being explored. Primarily it will do this by focussing on how the process of how the child's IEP is designed and reviewed.

The parent and teacher relationship.

Amongst the groups of parents and groups of teachers interviewed there was a high level of agreement in the perspectives that they brought to the relationships. There were also distinctive patterns in the way in which relationships were formed and developed. Despite the often very different individual characters of the teachers and the parents a strong set of themes can be drawn out of the data collected with surprising regularity. I have chosen seven to discuss here, which appear to form the heart of the relationship.

(a) the issue of who "leads" the relationship.

(i) The parents - one of the strongest themes in the parents' interviews was that it was the teachers who had taken the lead role in most interaction that the parents had with school. This was so in contact over day to day matters, but especially felt to be so where the children were experiencing difficulties at school. This approach is well summarised in the following quotations, taken from several of the interviews,

"To me personally I think it would have been better if they had asked me more instead of telling me what they were going to do ask me if it would benefit him in any way "

Parent H. - talking about how a previous teacher in the school had discussed her son's needs with her (Appendix 1, page 6).

T- Do you think the school knows about how you feel about your daughter ?

F- No.

T- Why is that ?

F- No-one has ever asked me.

T- They've never asked you

F- No, they tell me. There's an idea they should ask me really. But they never have done.

T- Would you like them to then ?

F- Yes, then I could tell them what I think.

Parent F. talking about the teacher's approach to her in parents' evenings.

T- have you been involved in any meetings or

J- Any meetings, no, I've just been told it I think Mr. L. (*the SENCo*) and Mr. C. (*the Headteacher*) said I could phone or leave it to Mr. L. That he is best left with these things so I am leaving it at the moment. "

Parent J. - talking about meetings she had had with the SENCo to discuss her son's needs.

In essence there was a strong feeling that this approach was one in which the teachers took the lead in the relationship by informing the parents and then asking them what they thought of what had been said.

However, it should not be automatically presumed that the parents wanted to take part in the "defining" process. As the quotations above illustrate what the parents wanted was to be asked and have the opportunity to have their views listened to. If the parents perceived that they were listened to and their views taken into account then they often looked to the teacher to tell them how best to support their child. A typical example of this view was that of Parent A. when asked how she would like the school to involve her more fully in supporting her child's difficulties,

"I think sometimes that we should be working together ... like whatever he is doing in his class and he's doing it wrong they should come to me and say that he needs to do this (*to help him*).... "

At another point in the interview Parent A. was asked whether she would like to be involved with the planning process of her son's work to meet his individual needs,

A. - Yes, I would like to know what is happening.

T- would you want some input in that would you want the teacher to say what would you like to see us focusing on

A - yes, if they want me to do something with my son if I can help him to do it at home but I need them to tell me because I don't know what he is doing in the classroom do I, you know ? So they need to tell me beforehand so that I can help him because I can't help him if I don't know what I am doing.

In putting forward this perspective it should be remembered though that parents within the school had not had the opportunity to be a "definer". As such, this type of role may well have simply have been outside their expectations and experience. Instead such a perspective may be taken to show the limited way in which parents were involved in reality rather than proving that they do not want to be involved at this level.

(ii) the teachers - the issue of leading the relationship was also a strong theme in the teacher interviews. In most of the interviews the teachers saw themselves as rightfully taking the lead in relationships with parents where children were experiencing difficulties. One of the

clearest definitions of the way these roles were viewed was put forward by Teacher 5 when answering the question, "what do you mean by partnership ?",

"I suppose I mean that everyone understands what everyone means in terms of communication ... is such, as if I say look this is the pattern of behaviour *I expect* from a certain child then the child knows that, the child knows that I know, parent knows that, and the parent and child know we are all kind of together"

In essence, the teachers saw themselves as the fulfilling the defining role within the relationship. In contrast, the parents were seen as fulfilling the role of supporting the school.

As Teacher 3 put it,

T- how would you involve the parents ... at what stage would you involve the parents ?

3- During the IEP or before ?

T- Yes, that is what I am asking would you involve them in actually setting up the work the child is going to do, or would you involve them once that has been done ?

3- I think probably once that has been done

T- So they would be in a sort of supporting role

3- yes, definitely a supportive role yes. Definitely being able to encourage the child at home and to be able to do similar sorts of things at home that they are doing at school."

This viewpoint was further explained by Teacher 5,

"So all of that has been communicated to the parent (*the needs of the child*) and that at that age they need additional support to help them achieve that. Then the parent has the opportunity to use all of the time that they have as a resource in their own home, comfort, quiet, whatever but in terms of the parent I think that once you have harnessed that parent's support then you are going to be

working in partnership as a team to enhance that child's learning and to help them to overcome whatever difficulties or whatever you (*the teacher*) have identified"

Teacher 5

The reasons for this division in roles appear to be three-fold. Firstly, the teachers viewed the area of defining the difficulties that the child was experiencing, and the curriculum required to meet those needs as one that required the specialist skills of the teacher. This process was explained by Teacher 2, when asked about her approach to deciding a child's special needs and designing an IEP for them,

"to pinpoint a child who initially you alight on and just seems to have a difficulty, whatever that might be, and then you pinpoint and try and be specific about that difficulty and then you try and break it down well, what can we do to help that child to overcome that difficulty in small steps"

If this process of definition was felt to be too complex for the teacher then there was a tendency to defer to an outside agency, such as the speech and language service,

"He (*John*) has a language processing problem so that when we do his IEP things etc., all the little things that we teach him, they are identified by the speech and language service as things that would be useful to him"

Teacher 6 - explaining how John's learning needs and targets were devised.

This hierarchical view of levels of skills in diagnosis and planning inevitably puts the teacher into a lead position within the parent and teacher relationship.

Secondly, they viewed the process of meeting the child's special needs as a technical process, beyond that of traditional planning for the class. As Teacher 3 explained concerning when to involve parents,

"I think probably once it (*the IEP*) has been done ... um because it is a very specific thing and it is quite difficult for us to get our heads round even and then if the steps have been broken down and then the targets are there that we are aiming at then I think that that would probably be the stage to bring the parent in."

This viewpoint was also put forward by Teacher 5,

"the one (*IEP*) that is most successful is the one that makes priorities because there may be several things that you can do to help that child in whatever area you have identified as being as being of concern and so if you focus on two or three achievable aims"

As can be seen from these quotations the reason for this appears to be the requirement that IEPs, in the teachers' minds, be approached in a specialist way.

Once the child had been defined as having special needs staff also tended to view the children as entering on a separate path from the others in the class. This was the path of the Code of Practice and the Individual Education Plan. It was perceived that this would be additional from the curriculum of the others in the class. This can be seen in the approach that two of the staff interviewed took to developing additional programmes of work for such children,

"I first of all see who is going to be in the class what the support staff are and what time they have got and basically I look at what we plan to do with that child and then put that work in to be done it's literally a matter of taking small bits of work when you have got the support to that."

Teacher 2 - explaining how she plans to meet a child's special needs in her class.

"It is specific to that 25 minutes in the sense that bit of learning that you are doing then so that is specific to then, but naturally if that is improved upon, then that will have a knock on effect on the rest (*of the curriculum*)."

Teacher 4 - when asked about how she approaches meeting a child's additional needs.

It was argued that this approach was the one that staff had been trained in by the SENCo. Indeed such a training session is described within the detailed description of the school concerning "how to write the perfect IEP".

This was further enforced by the belief amongst staff that it was this use of a technical approach, using technical language, that was demanded by the Local Authority when the school wished to access support from outside agencies. As Teacher 2 commented concerning the IEP,

"it's also used obviously if you think that the child has got a major problem to show to the authorities that you are identifying the problem and doing what you can so that at a later date you can say that you have done this but now it is beyond our means."

(Appendix 3, page 113)

Thirdly, there was a strong view that most parents are not able to make such defining judgements about aspects of their children because they were outside their day to day experience. It was not that staff "blamed" the parents for this but rather felt that they lacked the information and expertise to make such judgements. As Teacher 5 put it,

"I think the parents are in a vacuum very often parents don't often quite know what is expected and if you have, or even if a parent suspects that my child isn't quite as bright as, in inverted commas, as so and so, they are not going to voice it and share that sort of information (*with family and friends was the meaning here*) unless they are very close, I don't think."

Finally, this belief in the parent's wish that it was the teachers who should take the lead was bolstered in the teachers' minds by the experience that such leadership and any support offered was rarely, if ever turned down. As Teacher 2 commented,

"I haven't known a parent who said that they have not wanted that support."

(Appendix 3, page 115)

(b) teachers informing parents.

(i) the parents - there was also a strong agreed perception concerning what, and how, teachers informed parents about when their children were experiencing difficulties. In the parents' minds there was a clear division in how the teachers informed parents about difficulties of an academic and behavioural nature.

Parents felt that staff were much slower to share the academic difficulties that the children were facing. Often no reason could be given for this difference in approach but it was felt acutely. Most often this took the form of parents wishing they were told at an earlier stage so that they could support and help their children. Two heartfelt examples of this are the comments of Parent J. and Parent H. when talking about approaching staff with their concerns.

"If it's like if he can't cope then to phone me and say can you help John with such and such when he is at home with me ... because I would I would, even though some days I lose my temper But if I don't know what is going on in school then I can't help him because when I go to school for parents' evening they always say to me well he's doing fine"

Parent J. - talking about times when she has raised concerns about John's progress.

"I approached them (the teacher) and nothing wasn't done. It's not to say that I didn't try and when I did see that there was a problem I did tell them that there was a problem. They told that there wasn't a problem to give it time ... do

you know what I mean ? It was all of a sudden after this time and he was so far behind, all of a sudden you've got a problem. You know, which I had been telling them for two years that we've got a problem. So listening and taking on board what you had said. Alright I am not the teacher but I do know my child."

Parent H. explaining the response she had had from previous teachers when she raised concerns about Henry's progress in school (Appendix 1, page 7).

Interestingly two parents (Parents C. and F.) argued that they had never been told that their children were experiencing difficulties at school and had only received "good reports" from the teacher in question. Both of these children had held IEPs for the past two years. As Parent F. reported,

"Well I see the teacher and we have meetings (*parents' evenings*) I always come to parents' evenings and I see the teacher then. They tell me then how Fiona is doing. They are always very happy with her."

In contrast to this was the response parents felt that they experienced if the difficulty was of a behavioural nature. Two parents (Parents F. and H.) argued that it was the area of behaviour that teachers were most likely to initiate more informal contact and this to inform parents of poor behaviour and engage their support to improve that particular behaviour. As they explained about teachers initiating contact at the end of the day,

"they do if they have done something wrong like that time with Y (*her son*) yes, when they have done something wrong they wait and want to talk to you, but not if everything is OK."

Parent F.

H- When he didn't want to do it (*work in class*) it was me who was the bad one saying well you have to do it

T- Is that mainly why the school got you involved when he didn't want to

H- Yes. Because it started showing in his behaviour then. He started reacting then

Parent H. - comparing her earlier approaches over her worries about Henry's progress and when he started to have behavioural difficulties in class.

(ii) the teachers - the perception of teachers in this area was that they took care to inform parents on all aspects of their children's progress, including any difficulties the child was meeting. However, this belief in fully informing parents needs some unpacking. The first comment to be made is what the interviewed teachers meant by "informing" parents. This was most clearly explained in the interview with Teacher 2,

"I usually talk to the parents at parents' evening about ... like they are informed that their child has now got a need and what we are doing and is that OK with them ..."

(Appendix 3, page 115)

In essence what is meant by "informing" was telling the parent what the difficulty was and how the parent could support the school in meeting that need.

Secondly, there is the issue of the way in which teachers believed they had informed the parents about their child's special needs. There was a strong consensus in the interviews that parents had been informed of the difficulties that the children faced. However, this had been done in a general way and balanced with positive comments about the strengths of the child. As Teacher 1 commented concerning talking with Parent F about her daughter at parents' evening,

"I point them (*difficulties*) out but her mum is always so pleased with her
I suppose it is my fault really because I always start with what she is good at"

A similar approach was explained in greater detail by Teacher 5,

"I think that that is one thing that you really have to be careful of when you are teaching and working with parents of children with special needs is not to induce any extra stress on anybody's behalf I have known of situations where someone has said that this child is really, really struggling and on parents' evening the parent goes in and the teacher says oh they are fine and they talk about every area except the area in which they are really, really struggling so the parent gets a warped picture of how their child is interacting in school."

This was seen as being supportive toward the parent, but, as both quotations indicate, could also have the effect of the teacher and parent focusing on the strengths and "missing" the explanation of the child's difficulties.

Thirdly, it was felt that discussing the child's IEP was not a suitable approach to take in that parents tended to panic or switch off in the face of such a technical approach. That this was so can be seen from the following quotations,

T- Do you ever discuss the IEP with her (*the parent*) ? Has she ever seen it at all ?

1- I think the very first, um, I'm trying to remember, the very first parents' evening I had them with me but no-one seemed to be very interested in looking at them so I went back to just saying that they had extra help.

T- Do you know why they weren't very interested ? Was it just

1- They probably don't understand what it is. I mean, I don't think any of them would know what IEP meant, because we all talk these ridiculous codes.

Teacher 1 - talking about meeting with Parent D, at a Parent's Evening.

T- Is Ms. F. aware that Fiona has special needs ?

1- I have been through ... certainly when she was on Wellington Square, the fact that she has extra help and that she has worked in a smaller group for her maths

and has done extra work. Again I am not sure of what parents really make of it

- in Ms. F.'s case I'm not really sure that she knows what an IEP is.

T- No-one has taken her through it ?

1- No.

Teacher 1 - reporting conversations held with Parent F. concerning Fiona's difficulties in school.

(c) initiating contact.

(i) **the parents** - most of the parents within the sample had initiated contact with the school at various times, mainly about their children's progress at school. Indeed only one said that they had never initiated contact with the school. This was because it would mean going into school and having to mix with ethnic minority parents. This parent felt they couldn't do this unless there was a really serious issue that needed to be sorted out (Parent E.).

There was a tension in the type of response that parents perceived they met with if they did initiate contact. Mostly the response was friendly and felt to be helpful (especially in areas such as sorting out day to day problems or if the child was perceived to be progressing well at school). However, as has already been seen in the comments of Parents J. and H. earlier, where parents had brought forward issues that related to worries over lack of academic progress or they felt something was "wrong" with their child there was an expectation, based on experience, that such concerns would be met with platitudes and simple reassurances.

A further issue that was prevalent within the interviews was the strong feeling that once they had been informed of their child's difficulties, and asked to help, further contact tended to take place only during formal contact points such as parents' evenings. More informal, *ad hoc* contact had to be initiated by the parents. This perception is illustrated by the following quotations from several interviews,

"I can't say that they tell you everything ... it's a matter of us ... we're the parents
.....like me I always have to ask I have to ask ... "

Parent D. (Appendix 2, page 67).

T- So you have made the running ?

A- Yes.

T- All the time ?

A- Yes (*tone was one of being fed up with the whole process she has gone through - note made at time of transcription*). I've had to, if I hadn't nobody else would have you know.

Parent A. - talking about how the school has dealt with informing her about Adam's and her elder daughter's progress at school (both were considered to have special needs).

J- And I am not going to complain about this school because this school has done the best but then again if I don't go into school I wont know what is going on (*this said with intense feeling - note on transcription*).

T- So you have felt that you have had to go into school and

J- Sort things out, yes. I can't always be phoning either. And now I have the baby there is not much I can do

Parent J.

It was felt that such informal contact was met with a friendly response but seldom initiated by teachers (with the exception, as stated before, of situations of poor behaviour or if the child was making good progress). For example Parent B. noted,

T- When you talk to the teachers do you feel that they listen to what you say ?

B- Oh yes, yes.

T- so they take account of that ?

B- Yes, yes.

Finally, a poor experience of contact with a teacher does not seem necessarily to have an effect that influences the perceptions of the parent concerning other teachers more generally. This can be most clearly seen in the case of Parent H. She had built up a warm relationship with the teacher whose class her child had recently entered, even though the relationship with the previous teacher had virtually broken down. Her anger and frustration at the response of the earlier teacher have already been referred to (page 77). This is in clear contrast to passages where she talked about her relationship with the new teacher. For example, there is a sense of trust and relaxation in the following passage,

"I come in every so often in the week and I'll ask how he's been doing and what not and she'll say well he's had difficulty with this section of work and I'll take that section home and more or less he will breeze through it"

(ii) **the teachers** - for the teachers initiating contact appears to have been very dependant on whom they were initiating contact with, what the root cause of the need was perceived to be and at what stage of informing the parent about their child's difficulties they felt they were at.

In terms of whom the teacher was initiating contact with the crucial element appears to have been what sort of response the teacher expected to the contact made. This is best illustrated by contrasting the response of two teachers.

Firstly, a teacher who expected a negative response to her contact,

"And mum is very keen to know how Belinda is getting on and is supportive unfortunately more of the time she appears to be more supportive over the times when Belinda has been naughty and in carrying out sanctions. And when I say well, she has had a good day today she just says oh, that's good

Teacher 2

This rather negative expectation is in stark contrast to the response of a teacher who expected a more positive response,

T- So it's quite a good relationship between

1- I think so (*laughs*)

T- the two of you ?

1- Is that what she said (*laughs*). If she said there wasn't then I am saying there wasn't.

T- There was.

1- Good.

T- Is that something that you have had to work at ?

1- No, no because she is a very open person.

T- Yes.

1- She's very nice and quite bubbly (*said with warmth - note made on transcription*)

Teacher 1 talking about her relationship with Parent D.

There also appeared to be a marked difference in the warmth and desire to interact depending on what the teacher perceived to be the root cause of the difficulty the child was experiencing. This is best illustrated by contrasting two quotations from the same teacher about two different parents,

T- Do you think that she thinks that he is going to catch up (*with the other children*) ?

1- I suppose any parent would wish that. I don't know how seriously she really thinks it. I try not to build her hopes too high. I am very keen to tell her the positives but I don't want her to think that he is suddenly going to catch up.

Teacher 1 talking about Parent H.

"I've tried to talk to him before but I'm not sure he even knows who I am possibly I mean that I have tried to be positive about it (Eddy's disruptive behaviour) and say that he has had a good day, but he has never appeared interested."

Teacher 1 talking about Parent E.

In the first case the perceived need was medical in nature. The response is a warm one in which the teacher has gone out of her way to help reassure and inform the parent. In the second case the need was considered to be behavioural in nature (albeit influenced by a difficulty in reading). The response is colder in tone with no real effort to develop the relationship and an acceptance that the parent is simply not interested, even though the parent was not perceived to be hostile. Put simply, the willingness to initiate contact would appear to depend not only on the perceived character of the parent but also the teacher's view of the root cause of the difficulty.

In terms of the stage of the relationship, the teachers put forward a distinct pattern of interaction. When first explaining the difficulties that the teacher felt the child was experiencing there was a willingness to initiate contact with the parent. However, after this this willingness altered. The reasons given for this were largely that there was too little time and other priorities held sway in a busy day. As Teachers 3 and 4 explained,

"I tend to think that the more important part is getting the support (*of the parents*) in the first place. But obviously it would be nice to monitor and hope that progress was being made at home and it was being carried on because, as with all these things, as time goes on you tend to forget, you tend to put it on one side because of other priorities, so you don't quite know if the support is the same at the end of the term as it was at the beginning."

Teacher 3.

".... but I feel that it doesn't work that way and I am sure that that is largely due to lack of resources, lack of time if we had to review for every parent

of every child that is on an IEP we would be forever in meetings and I don't see how we could practically do that."

Teacher 4.

Besides these three elements there was also a presumption that relationships within the school were such that if parents were unhappy about anything then they would approach the teacher. Typical of this belief was the comment of Teacher 1 when asked whether she thought she had a good relationship with Parent F,

"I think so. I would be frightened if not, I wouldn't be worried about going to her and talking to her about anything. I hope that she wouldn't feel intimidated by me saying anything."

This belief was often bolstered by a further perception about their approachability. As Teacher 2 put it when asked about whether Belinda's parents were happy with the level of contact with school,

"I think so, yes. They haven't said otherwise. "

(Appendix 3, page 119)

In other words there was a belief that unless the parents said otherwise everything was continuing smoothly.

(d) the analysis of the difficulties the child is facing.

(i) the parents - all the parents within the interviews were asked specifically what they thought was at the root of the difficulties their child was experiencing. All except one of the parents had a coherent analysis to put forward and many of these were highly developed, often complex explanations. The exceptions to this were Parents C. and F. who genuinely believed their children were not experiencing difficulties at school and had not been told of any difficulties by the class teacher.

Perhaps surprisingly, these analyses fell into three very specific groups. The first was that their child experienced difficulties where they had a lack of interest in what was being taught. This, in turn, led to a loss of concentration and a subsequent lack of progress.

An example of this type of argument can be found within the interview with Parent E. When explaining about why Eddy appeared to be doing well in science he commented,

"now science he does seem to have an interest in that it occupies his mind."

and later, when talking about things Eddy is doing well in at school,

"he can relate to those or whatever he can relate to those."

In contrast, when considering areas his son was finding more difficult he commented,

"he just has a blank expression as ifhe knows that you are talking to him but he doesn't seem to want to correspond to what you are saying. He just ... it's like a switch that you just turn off."

This viewpoint was also put forward by Parent A. as part of her explanation of why Adam was struggling at school while she felt he was much more focused at home,

"Yes, he understands everything that I (*emphasised by tone of voice - transcript note*) say to him maybe because he wants to listen to me ... that's what I am saying."

And a little later,

"He will only listen if he wants to listen ... if it's in his interest."

The second located the root of the difficulty in the specific teaching style of the teacher. As Parent H. put it when asked why Henry found so many areas of the curriculum so difficult,

"I would say that he finds it (*learning*) difficult, it's the way that he has been taught that he finds difficult."

The reason for this was perceived to be the previous teacher's approach of insisting he try for himself (Appendix 1, page 4, and quoted in full at chapter 6, page 147).

This argument was also put forward by Parent J.,

"I think he (*the class teacher*) puts the ones who find things a bit harder together and I don't think that he should do that ... I think that he should put each one with other people who are more up to date on it and then the kids would learn more"

It was also put forward in a more tentative way by Parent F. when asked why her daughter found maths much more difficult than any other part of the curriculum,

"I don't know really. They (*her children*) all find maths difficult. Maybe it is how they were taught I'm not sure."

Put simply, these parents believed that it was the specific way of presenting the work that made it inaccessible to the child and, consequently, they made little progress. The third quotation is particularly interesting in that while Parent F. appeared genuinely unsure of her explanation her first thought was to focus on the way her daughter had been taught, rather than on an in-child explanation.

The third located the reason in a lack of memory, or retention, of things that the child has been taught. As Parent J. explained,

"He tries to work it out on his own and even if he does after 2 seconds he has forgotten it."

Parents A. and J. both felt that this difficulty of memory was the root of the difficulties that their children were experiencing. However, both parents also felt that this would be remediated largely if the teacher took a different approach to how they taught. In the case of Parent A. this was the lack of individual teaching leading to the teacher gaining the child's interest. Whereas Parent J. felt that her child would do better if he had the challenge of more able children around him rather than working in a group of children who experienced the same level of struggle (both discussed previously).

Again these explanations are interesting, in that while they superficially locate the difficulty within the child both parents are very quick to refocus the "blame" for the difficulty being as severe as it is in the teaching approach of the teacher.

(ii) the teachers - in all the teacher interviews a specific question was asked about what they believed to be the root causes of children's special needs in general. A list was asked for and then discussion took place to judge the importance attached to each cause.

A number of causes were listed. These included physical needs, emotional immaturity, difficulties in memory and retention, specific medical conditions, lack of experiences in the home, lack of support at home, the child's home background, behaviour management at home, a lack of interest in specific areas of the curriculum, children not understanding what they had been taught, prolonged absence and work having been set at an inappropriate level for that child. There was a great deal of commonality in the causes listed, with the exception of the last cause listed (suggested by Teacher 3 only).

Crucially for this study there was also a commonality in the two areas felt to be the most common root cause. The most common was the impact of the home background of the child (5 out of the 6 teachers interviewed as well as the school's SENCo). This could take the form of a lack of experiences at home (Teacher 1), poor learnt behaviour and routines (Teacher 2), a lack of family support (Teachers 3 and 5), and the home environment and parental management leaving the child in a state of emotional turmoil (Teachers 4 and 1). This is not to say that the teachers were hostile in their attitude toward the parents and the home

environment that they provided. Rather such views were presented as an everyday reality. Perhaps this is best summed up within the comments made by Teacher 5,

"... over the years my whole teaching philosophy has been the children bring to school as much as they can but they do bring everything that they can ..all right ? .. and very often a good school will nurture all of that *no matter what they bring* (my italics)"

This teacher also commented,

"When you have identified a child in your class as being you know, for whatever reason, having special needs within the academic class situation and you look back into the ... um home background of the child so many times you have got a situation when you think crikey, where is the support for this child ... it sounds like I am being really ... um ... denigrating that but I am not actually, I'm just trying to be terribly practical."

The second most common root cause was felt to have a medical cause. This was felt to be relatively uncommon in reality, but to be a key cause in two of the children interviewed (Henry and John).

These views are also very interesting if what is not included is considered. Apart from one teacher (Teacher 3) there was little consideration of the root cause lying within the school, its curriculum or the teaching methods. Even in this one case the issue of the setting of an inappropriate level of work was felt to be a minor cause of difficulty.

Why is this ? One possible answer is the comment made by several of the teachers that the curriculum is something that is largely beyond the teacher's control and that under curriculum such as the National Literacy Strategy (1998), the work and its form of presentation is fixed,

"That is a tricky one, ... actually, because in this day and age the curriculum is set isn't it so whether we like it or not we have to give out that dose so with experience you and I both know that we moderate

it to a certain extent to the abilities of the children but we can't change it and teach something else"

Teacher 5 - explaining the effect a child's special needs has on the class curriculum.

Another may be within the comment made by Teacher 2,

"I can't do two lessons - I haven't got time for that."

(Appendix 3, page 114)

The implication here is that there is only time within the school timetable to present the curriculum in one, if differentiated, way and that those who cannot access it in this form need a separate approach distinct from the normal class approach. Certainly within the sample there was a reluctance (possibly based on a sense of powerlessness) to alter the content or approach to teaching work based on the needs of a small minority.

Whatever the reason, the primary location of the root of the difficulties in the perceptions of the teachers were within the home. In this sense, with the possible exception of a medical condition, the home background, and by implication the parents, were considered to be part of the "difficulties" the school had to overcome. This was not a conscious perception that led to a "hostile" approach towards parents but does see the school as a compensator for parental deficiencies. This has serious implications in considering a relationship in which the teacher already views themselves as the expert to be relied on.

(e) the context of the relationships - formal and informal meetings.

(i) the parents - with the exception of Greta's mother and Parent E. all the parents regularly attended parents' evenings and had held occasional chats with the teacher at the classroom door (mainly after school). Only three of the parents had held separate meetings with staff concerning their child's difficulties (Parents J., A., and H.) and each time this had been with the school SENCo.

The underlying perception of these meetings amongst the parents who attended, or had chatted more informally, was that of being aware of the public nature of such meetings. This often led to a feeling of vulnerability. This is best illustrated by the comment made by Parent B., who felt that she needed to ask on a daily basis about her child's behaviour to monitor whether or not it was improving,

T- In terms of how the teacher told you about that (*Fiona's behaviour that day*).

How would you like that to be improved ?

B- (*no answer but facial expression was one of deep thought - by this time*

Ms. B. was facially showing crossness - transcription note)

T- Do you wish that they had sat down and talked it all through with you ?

B- Yes ... not all the time but to come across like pleasant and not so pressured ... like the teacher looks so fed up !

T- And that puts you off I guess.

B- Yes.

T- So you felt that they put it across as if they were cross with you as well ?

B- Yes and in front of all those people ... perhaps they could talk to me in a friendlier way.

In another case (Parent C.) this dislike was added to by the issue of the need for translation to communicate. This was not always immediately available and there was a polite, but deeply felt, criticism that only trusted members of staff should be used for translation (not "other girls" as she referred to other parents or unknown support staff). These views have important implications if it is remembered that the main point of contact with staff is at these times.

So what would parents prefer instead ? One common suggestion was put forward by Parent A.,

A- Say about twice a year I would only expect it every so often because they are only going to keep telling me the same things over again if you have it frequently. If it's like every six months it's OK like that.

T- And what sort of things would you want to have discussed in that meeting ?

A- Well I would want to discuss everything that Adam needs help with. I don't want to talk just about his writing and his spelling because I think that there are other aspects that he finds hard in the classroom and I'd want them to talk to me about all of it.

T- So you would want quite an in-depth go through

A- Yes ... which I think that I am entitled to you know ... that's what I think. I feel like the teacher here telling you what because it's not very often that I get to put my views forward in a private meeting like that.

Within this view there was also a recognition that compromises might have to be made on both sides,

B- I don't know, it would probably be difficult but the teacher has other children to watch and you know, discuss things with other parents ...

T- So you would like more time to talk ... or a different time to talk ?

B- yes, both, or more time ... yes.

T- Do you feel that you are rushed ?

B- Yes. Because straight after school I come for Belinda I have to head off and go to work.

T- So do you feel that if you said to her teacher I would like to talk to you about Belinda that you would be able to find a time which is convenient to the two of you ? Or do you feel that you would have to fit within the school's time ?

B- I feel as if I could find a time.

T- And you feel that the school would make that time as well ?

B- Yes.

Parent B. - explaining the possible difficulties of a teacher meeting with her at a time that was more convenient to her.

(ii) the teachers - for the teachers the main meeting point with parents was the parents' evening. This was seen as a time when all aspects of the child's educational progress could be discussed. As has been pointed out teachers within the sample reported that they were willing

to talk to parents outside of school hours but that they seldom initiated this type of contact unless it was a first meeting.

However, the teachers did recognise that there were limitations with the format of the parents' evening. Primary amongst these was the potential lack of privacy for parents. A common argument was that parents either did not want to talk about their child's difficulties or appeared to switch off. This dilemma was described by Teacher 1,

"I mean, I want to tell them that their children get extra help but I feel embarrassed that they are having to be told in front of other parents, who are obviously listening because you are always trying to measure your child against somebody else ... um ... in the same way, if they are having a particular problem it is very difficult to be as plain as possible. You end up having to talk in codes and I don't think that everybody understands what you're trying to say. So I think a more private interview would be better."

So why do teachers put such reliance on the parents' evening if they also recognise it has limitations as a context ? The answer appears to lie in the pressures that the teachers feel that they are under. Typical of this argument is the comments of Teacher 3,

" you know how important that link (*with the parents*) is but there is a lack of energy, yes... but it's a case of everybody is so timetabled in what there is that during the working day there is not time I would say ... straight after school, if there are meetings straight after school there is no time then which brings you down to once a term which might just be parents' evening and maybe you would need more ...obviously it would be nice to have a one to one but it is time .. it really is time."

This feeling of the pressure of time was further reflected in the comments of Teacher 4, who argued that as a parent herself with a child with special needs she would expect to be involved in the decision making process,

"but I feel that it doesn't work that way and I am sure that it is largely to do with the lack of resources, lack of time if we had to review with every parent of every child that is on an IEP we would forever be in meetings and I don't see how practically we could do that."

A further reason probably also lies in the way that the IEP is written. Teachers were each given a half day of non-contact time per term to prepare IEPs. This was begun to allow staff to develop IEPs that would be considered in their approach, and hence implemented. Such a process takes time. As Teacher 3 argues,

"It would be nice it is not always the case and sometimes there is no time for this but it would be really nice for them (*the parents*) to be able to say how they feel that the progress is going on through the term. But it is time especially if you have a large number of SEN children to write IEPs for when you get the time."

Teacher 3 - discussing the pressures of time in involving parents
in reviewing IEPs.

If the feeling of pressure of workload is combined with the belief in the process of defining and meeting special needs is a skilled one it is perhaps not surprising that the teachers choose to develop their IEPs without the parents being present.

(f) the impact of ethnicity.

Within the interview data there was little mention made of the issue of ethnicity, either by the parents or the teachers. However, it did arise as an issue in three distinctive areas in a

minority of the interviews. These are worth exploring briefly:

(i) **the parents** - the issue of ethnicity was raised in two areas of discussion by the parents. Firstly there was a recognition that the parents had experienced racism in the wider context of their lives. In the case of Parent D. this was in the day to day experience of going out (Appendix 2, page 61). In the case of Parent F. this was something she had experienced from a teacher at a school that she had attended.

However, a second area where the issue of ethnicity appears to have had an effect was located within the school itself. This was in the area of the context within which contact between the teacher and parent took place and can probably be best termed as unintended cultural insensitivity.

Three examples can be seen within the data collected. Parent D. was concerned that the open nature of meetings between her and the teacher meant that there was a chance that her involvement in helping to meet her daughter's needs would get back to her parents-in-law. As a woman from a traditional Muslim family she was concerned that such involvement might be construed by her parents-in-law as going behind their back,

"Well, it's not just busy. I mean, they'll be saying things like oh, where are you going and things like that. It's difficult the thing is I'm not living in my own house, I'm living with in-laws. It's like don't go here, don't go there"

(Appendix 2, page 68).

Secondly, Parent C. felt that the possible lack of interpreters when she wished to talk to the teacher meant that her relationship with the teacher was effectively restricted to formal meetings. This was made worse when, to facilitate discussion, the teacher invited an unknown helper, another parent, or even sometimes a child, to act as a makeshift translator.

Thirdly, Parent E. argued that he felt that he could not discuss issues with the teacher face to face because this meant coming into school to do this. He argued that he could not do this because he did not want to mix with parents from ethnic minorities. While this essentially

racist viewpoint cannot be condoned, the perceived unwillingness of teachers to come to him meant that he tended to avoid contact with the teacher.

(ii) the teachers - in the case of the teachers interviewed the issue of ethnicity arose on only two occasions. Firstly, there was a recognition by Teacher 3 that the lack of translation facilities, and the use of other parents to act as translators, could be viewed as unwelcome. However, because the parents did not say so it was presumed that such use of other parents was acceptable. Clearly, from the case of Parent C. this was not so but because she didn't say otherwise it was presumed that she was happy with this arrangement.

Secondly, Teacher 5 raised the issue of ethnicity in terms of the teacher's lack of knowledge about different cultural backgrounds. This, she argued, might cause them to make ill-advised judgements about the family that the child came from. This was so in the areas of "values from the home that may conflict with school" and knowledge about such issues as a Muslim child's need to fast during Ramadan.

What is interesting here are not so much the areas discussed above but the lack of comments made by parents and teacher concerning the impact of ethnicity. The lack of sensitivity on the part of some of the teachers, although unintended, was having an impact on the quality of some of the relationships. However, because the issue was not raised by the parent matters were presumed to be acceptable.

(g) the basis on which to consider the child's difficulties.

A final interesting aspect of the data from the parent and teacher interviews is where they drew their information from to reach their conclusions about the child's needs and how best to meet them. Again an interesting contrast can be drawn.

(i) the parents - for the parents there appeared to be a variety of evidences used. A typical range of these evidences can be drawn from the interview with Parent D. Firstly, there is observation at home of times when the parent has helped the child and this is often linked to comparison to siblings,

"When she does her work (*at home*) ... if she finds ... if I say oh Devi just hold on a minute, I'm just doing this job and I'll come and tell you what to do next but when I tell her to do it, it's like if she finds it a bit difficult she doesn't want to know she gives up really quickly, yes whereas U. (*her elder son*) he's totally different to Devi he tries his best and tries his best so much "

This is linked to observations when Parent D. attends school functions, such as assemblies,

"...like when she did her assembly last time I always come to the assembly when I know it is my kid's assembly when she was getting a certificate and things for instance she was doing a play ... she was right behind and she even had her back to the school so what is she going to do in class. I've seen her sometimes in class when she answers questions cause she's a bit scared to ask"

Parent D - explaining how she knows her daughter is shy in school,

Further, there is what Devi reports back to her herself,

"Science. I don't knowshescience she was telling me that she was doing something about light or something."

Finally, there is the information that the teacher gives to her,

"I think that she does (*find it difficult to ask for help*) cause I know the way that she is in class because I communicate a lot with the teachers as well."

Interestingly, in only one of the interviews with the parents did a parent say that she had asked friends and family for advice (Parent J.).

However, these ways of gaining such knowledge need to be linked to the lack of information that the parents had about both what their children were learning and how their children were actually taught.

T- Can you tell me how you think that Belinda is taught by her teacher ?

B- I don't really know. I suppose she must teach them all the same thing and they work in groups. I'm not sure I've not seen but teaching the whole class at once ... that seems sensible doesn't it ?

Parent B.

T- You have told me that Chandani is taught spelling and writing and reading what else is she taught at school that you know of ?

C- (*Ms C.. is confused by this question and turns to Chandani - Chandani says geography but mum thinks that she is wrong because this is only done at secondary school - transcription note*). No, maths, English and Chandani says that she does RE (*Ms C. is obviously surprised by this - transcription note*) I feel that they only do subjects like geography in secondary schools but in school just do writing.

Parent C.

In essence, then, even if the parents had suspicions that their child was experiencing difficulties they had little in the way of "benchmarks" to hang their suspicions on. They had to depend on the school to provide these for them. This was a major surprise for myself as a teacher in the school and especially so as all three of the parents quoted have had several children attend the school.

(ii) the teachers - within the teachers' interviews there was a recognition that parents probably found it difficult to judge whether their children were experiencing difficulties at school and the extent of these difficulties. However, there was little desire to alter this situation. One teacher felt that she had spent extensive time explaining the curriculum, school organisation and the special needs process,

"I have tried to explain to her - I try to explain to her on parents' evening when she has been in before. How Henry fits into the whole and that he is set different work at a much lower level."

Teacher 1 about Parent H.

It is interesting to note that out of all the relationships this was probably the most harmonious and trusting.

Other staff tended to feel a different approach was more appropriate. This is best summed up by the comment of Teacher 5 when explaining about first talking with a parent about their child experiencing difficulties at school,

"I would have some forms of concrete evidence so that you have got something. And I would make a comparison with another child say of average ability in the class not named .. but to show the parent a piece of work that showed the special need if I had identified that was what the child was struggling with to just say look this is what we are really aiming at ... so and so isn't able to get there because I think parents are in a vacuum very often."

While this form of comparison is indeed informing the parent, and in this case was genuinely well meant to inform, it is in the form of a "*fait accompli*". Rather than explaining the context and providing useable knowledge to make an informed decision it is proving a point and giving the parent no way of discussing the difficulty in an informed way.

The reason most often given for favouring this approach, as was discussed earlier, was the one of the time needed to explain such matters to parents when compared to the interest that the teachers perceived the parents would respond with. This was also linked in part to the perceived lack of interest when staff had tried to explain the child's IEP to the parent (also discussed earlier).

For the teachers themselves there were a variety of evidences that they tended to rely upon. Great trust was put in outside agencies and they were looked to to fulfil the role of "definer" in cases which teachers considered to be outside their experience (typically the medical conditions of children Henry and John).

Within the interviews other evidences such as SATs results, ongoing assessment, regular testing and recording incidents of behaviour were listed (Teachers 2, 3, and 5). This is not surprising, as these are part of the everyday life of the teacher.

However, in the case of children Devi and Belinda another form of evidence was suggested which is not so immediately obvious. This was the evidence of comments made by past teachers who had taught the child,

T- Do you know why she is like that ?

1- No, no I just know that speaking to other people (*by inference other teachers -transcription note*) she has always been like that. Nothing would make her hurry, nothing.

Teacher 1 - explaining why she thought Devi was so passive in class.

In a sense, then, these children had gained a sort of folklore around them (Devi for being passive and disinterested in work and Belinda for not being able to work with others) which had become so ingrained that it followed the children almost unquestioned by the new teacher.

The child and teacher relationship.

Having explored the perspectives, and experiences, of the parents and teachers within their relationship it is now time to move on to the second relationship to be explored. This is the relationship between the children themselves and their teachers. Within the interviews three major themes emerged - the involvement of the child within the planning process, the

analysis of the difficulties that the child was experiencing, and the children's response to the way in which their needs were being met. I will explore each of these themes in turn. I will then briefly explore the issue of the impact of ethnicity on the relationship.

(i) Involving the child in planning to meet their special needs.

(a) the children - within the interviews there was little evidence that the children perceived themselves as involved in the process of planning to meet their special needs. When asked whether they had been asked what they thought they found difficult at school the response was usually a simple no or a lack of response. The responses of Fiona and Belinda were typical,

T- Do you think that Ms. P. (*her teacher*) knows that you find these things difficult ?

F - No.

T- No why do you think that she doesn't know ?

F- (*a very long pause*).

T- Have you ever told her that you find them difficult ?

F- No (*this felt a bit like getting blood out of a stone but was said with great intensity - transcription note*)

T- Has she ever asked ?

F- (*no answer - Fiona appeared genuinely confused by my continuing to ask this - transcription note*)

Fiona

T- Has Mrs. K. or a teacher ever asked you what you find difficult ?

Have they ever said Belinda what do you find difficult at school ?

B- No.

Belinda

For the children there was also little awareness that they received any additional help. Most often when asked to describe how the teacher helped them with things that they found difficult they described help that was within the everyday functioning of the classroom. The following quotations are typical examples:

"Sometimes he helps me and in giving me some sentences and sometimes I have to think for myself."

Devi - offered additional help with completing tasks.

"She reads to me I read the first line no, she reads the first line and then I read the second and the third"

Eddy - on a structured behaviour programme that involved weekly mentoring.

J- Sometimes he says come on the carpet if you need help.

T- Right. Is that especially for you ? Or for everyone ?

J- It's for everyone else.

T- Right. So, tell me again what he does.

J- Um, before we go to our seats he will say if anyone needs help stay on the carpet.

T- Right, and what does he do there ?

J- He starts helping us. Sometimes he writes people's work and gives it back to them and they carry on.

.....

T- And does he write in your book for you as well ?

J- If there is someone near him he gets their book.

T- And is that yours ?

J- (*shakes head - rather sad looking - transcription note*)

John - withdrawn from class on a regular basis.

This lack of awareness, given that two of the examples were of children withdrawn for extra help on a regular basis, is surprising. However, the explanation might lie in the fact that there is a long history of classroom assistants working in classes throughout the school, as well as withdrawing groups of children for short periods of time to work with them (see the contextual description earlier). It appears that with little or no involvement in planning the additional help the children saw such strategies as a continuation of the everyday support offered to all the children.

Further, there was also uncertainty when it came to describing the relationship that their parents had with school. Henry and Devi were quite sure that they discussed their needs,

T- Do you think what your mum and dad know what you find that you find
it difficult to listen and to concentrate ?

H- Well I haven't telled them yet.

T- Do you think that they know anyway ?

H- I think so.

T- How do you think they know ? How did they find out ?

H- By, um Ms. P. (*his teacher*) told them.

Henry.

T- So does the teacher tell your mum and dad that you find some things
difficult at school ?

D- Just my mum. My dad don't collect me because he works at Cadburys.

Devi

While others were confident that their parents met their teachers they were less sure what was talked about,

T- So what do you think that they talk about at Parent's Evenings ?

C- About my work.

Chandani

T- Do you think that your mum and your teacher ever talk about you ? (*Greta shakes head - transcription note*) No. So does your mum come to things like parents' evenings ?

G- Yes. Probably on parents' evening they do.

T- And what sort of things do you think that they talk about ?

G- Behaviour and my work.

And later on,

T- Do you stay with your mum when that is happening or does you mum say go into the hall and find something to do ?

G- I don't stay with my mum.

Greta

T- Do you think that your mum and Ms. P. (*his teacher*) ever talk about how you are doing at school ?

A- Yes.

T- Do you know what they talk about ?

A- I've seen them talk um

Adam

There was a common feeling that their parents and teachers did talk about them. However, as they were seldom present at such discussions, or involved in them, there was uncertainty

about the content of such conversations. Such discussions were believed to happen mainly at parents' evenings and most of the children were either left at home during this time or sent to play in the hall while their parent and teacher talked. The most that the majority of the children could offer was that parents received a form of progress report on how well they were doing at school.

Nor did the children appear to receive any sort of feedback from their parents about what was said. The only exception to this was Henry who reported,

T- And have they (*his parents*) ever said anything to you about it ?

H- yes.

T- What have they said ?

H- (*laughs*) Sometimes they say it back to me that I need a bit more work and that

Even in this case it is noticeable that Henry has no real idea of what his teacher has said about him - simply that there are parts of the curriculum that he needs to do more work on.

Yet, if given the opportunity would the children want to be involved in such a process or would they prefer it simply to "happen to them" ? When asked the answer was unanimous. They would like to be asked for their views and felt that they should be asked. Often they were unsure what they would say or how they would use such an opportunity (this is unsurprising given the lack of opportunity so far) but such an opportunity would be readily welcomed. To use Fiona's words they would like to be asked " Just so that she (*the teacher*) knows." and that would help "by getting your work right so I can get it right."

This view was strongest amongst the older children, who also saw such involvement as a form of right to which they should be entitled. This view was most forcefully put by Greta, a Year 5 child,

T- Do you think that they should ask you what you find difficult ?

G- Yes. I think I have a right to tell them so they can help me.

However, even the youngest child, Adam, felt that the opportunity to explain his ideas is something that he would like.

T- Would you like the teachers to ask you how they could help you ?

(Adam nods head) Right. And do you think that you could answer them ?

(Adam nods head more definitely) OK. You wouldn't get all nervous or anything ? *(Adam begins to look worried - nods head again)* You think that you would ? *(Adam nods head)*

(b) the teachers - within the interviews the teachers had very definite views about the role of the children in defining their needs and developing ways to meet those needs. These views are most graphically illustrated by three quotations in answer to the question - would you involve the children in the IEP process at all ?

3- as they get older and maybe as they get into Key Stage 2 then, yes ... they do understand whether they have taken the work home, whether they have done what they are required to ... and they get a real sense of achievement if they are getting there the following day.

T- So is a taking of responsibility *(to complete the work set)* for the children ?

3- Yes, Yes ... and if they take that on board they are much more motivated

Teacher 3.

"I haven't done, but I can see no I think if the child is aware that he has got a problemsome of my children are very young ... I've never done it to actually say do you think we should but yes I do tell the child well you seem to be a bit stuck here and we need to sort this out but it is no more than that really."

Teacher 2. - a Key Stage 1 teacher, Appendix 3, page 115.

6- Right, the targets that I've set that I have explained to John, OK ?

Um, there aren't targets that John has set for himself. Does that make sense ?

T- Yes. But he has an ownership of those targets ? You've discussed it with him ?

6- Yes, and at the point of discussing those targets he agrees, yes ? He manifests that he understands what we are talking about.

Teacher 6.

These three quotations, typical of many others, highlight the perspective found within the interviews. If the children play a role in the working together to meet their needs it is once the needs have been defined and the core decisions about the form that such help should take have been made. Sometimes the difficulty that the teacher perceives the child has is explained to them, but this depends on whether the teacher believes that the child is aware that they have a problem. The responsibility of the child is to understand the targets set and complete the additional work set for them.

In this sense, then, the child has no involvement but is rather a doer of tasks set for them for their benefit. However, it should be also stressed that this imposition was seen to be in the best interests of the child. As Teacher 6 put it,

"I suppose imposed, well intentionally yes, but certainly imposed".

The reasons for this view are not difficult to locate within the perspectives of the teachers. Firstly, if the teachers feel that diagnosing and planning for special needs is outside the ability of most parents how much more so this is with the children. The children do not have the "expertise" to participate at a meaningful level. As the second quotation also suggests there was also some question about whether some of the children are even aware of the difficulties that the teachers perceived that they were experiencing. In this case this was linked to age (or perhaps maturity level) but in other cases it was questioned whether the child would be aware at all.

This also has to be combined with the low expectations that several of the teachers had of any contribution the child might have made. Teacher 3. argued that children find it difficult not to associate finding a task easy with liking it at that particular moment. In other words their views are short-term and based on what they happen to be enjoying at that time,

"She obviously knows whatever she is good at she will her way of putting it would be that she likes that subject so if she is confident with it she is going to like it and that is probably going to be her favourite subject, what she says she finds easy. And if she is lacking in confidence and she is struggling with it she is going to say I don't like it and that is what she will say that she finds difficult. That will probably coincide it should do."

Another teacher focused on the issue of asking the child for their views,

"I have never found anyone yet who has been completely stumped and has nothing to say but often it isn't to do with their progress and how well they have done but they might just say I like my writing or I like such and such which I always write down"

Teacher 4. - on times when she had sought the views of children.

Put simply when the teacher had tried to ask the views of the child they had found the result disappointing. This only served to enhance the underlying belief that the child was incapable of reflecting at this level.

(ii) the analysis of the difficulties the child is facing.

The analysis of the children's difficulties by the teachers has been looked at in some detail in the previous section. However, given the teachers' perceptions about involving the children in the planning process it is important to explore whether the children could provide a coherent rationale of their own difficulties. From the teachers' point of view perhaps little should be expected. As will be seen, this view is far from the truth.

Within the eight interviews carried out all the children could define which areas of school life and the curriculum they perceived that they found problematic. Further, with a little encouragement and time, all eight presented perceptions of why they found these areas difficult. While they found the issue of "why" more difficult than the issue of "what", there

was a coherence and sophistication that left little doubt that even the youngest child (at five years old) was capable of holding a coherent perspective of their situation,

A- They tease me.

T- They tease you. What sort of things do they say ?

A- Um

T- What do they do to tease you ?

A- They say they are not my friend.

T- They say that they are not your friend. What, because you can't read the words and things ?

A- Um (*nods head sadly - transcription note*)

Adam - explaining why he thinks he finds reading difficult.

Moreover, these views were often repeated several times in each interview and were usually of a long-term nature rather than relating to issues that had happened in the classroom that day. In fact only one child referred to a situation that had arisen that day (Fiona) - the issue of frustration at not being able to build a bridge in design and technology.

Nor did the interviews provide evidence that the children could not differentiate between what they disliked and what they were experiencing difficulties in. For example Fiona was very clear when it came to the difference between what she liked and what she found easy,

T- If I said pick the one that you find easiest which one would you pick ?

F- (*points to the writing card - transcript note*)

T- Writing you find writing the easiest . Why do you think that you find writing easiest ?

F- Because because I can write neat.

And later in the interview,

T- What do you like doing best, writing or doing maths ?

F- Doing maths.

Chandani made an equally clear distinction in her explanations of her struggles in reading,

T- OK. And what about reading ?

C- Sometimes the words are hard.

T- So do you have problems working out the words or understanding
what they mean, or both, or neither

C- Working out the words (*very quietly - as if it was something terrible
to admit - transcription note*)

T- That's alright. But once you have worked out the words you can understand ?

C- Yes.

It is worth exploring the detail of some of these explanations to gain a flavour of the type of perception held. Greta was one of the oldest children in the sample interviewed. She identified two areas that she perceived that she had difficulties in - her English work and keeping her temper (Greta's IEP focuses solely on inappropriate behaviour and losing her temper). In the first Greta was able to define what she found difficult and when,

G- Like if they are writing a question and it has long words I wont understand
it ... especially when it is independent (*independent work in the Literacy Hour*)

T- So you find it difficult when you are working by yourself

G- I can work by myself in maths and other things, but English ... the questions

T- So you can read the words but it is just understanding them ?

G- Yes.

As can be seen, she was careful to make this distinction between her ability to read words and her understanding of what she read. Consequently there were significant parts of her work that she felt she could not attempt. Having to work independently meant that she could not check her guesses and she did not have the confidence in herself to take a chance without

the reassurance of the teacher. At one point of the interview I tried to broaden the issue of working independently out to cover all independent work. Greta was quick to correct me,

" not just independent work ... I don't find other independent work difficult. "

With the issue of keeping her temper Greta could define what made her lose her temper - "teasing", "pulling faces" and "if they hit me I will hit them back". However, Greta had a very different approach to gaining help.

T- And do you think that your teacher knows that you find it difficult to keep your temper as well ? (*Nods head - transcription note*). Right. How does she know that ?

G- Because she knows I don't really explain my things with Ms. R. (*her teacher*), I explain it with Mr. K. (*another teacher*).

T- Right but you are not in Mr. K.'s class are you ?

G- I know but like in playtime or dinnertime

T- Right you go and talk to Mr. K. ?

G- Yes

T- So do you mainly lose your temper at playtime or dinnertime ?

G- In the class as well

T- So do you think that Ms. R. really knows that you find this difficult ?

(*Greta shakes head and smiles*) No. OK

However, it was the first difficulty that was uppermost in her mind and caused her most worry.

Greta was one of the oldest children in the sample, what of one of the younger ones ? Belinda perceived that she was in trouble with her teacher on a regular basis, but focused on her difficulty of understanding what the teacher said,

T- What about understanding what the teacher says ?

B- That I feel sweaty and I need to move about.

T- So you find it difficult to sit still ?

B- um (*yes*)

T- And you feel all hot and sweaty ?

B- Yes.

T- Right and how does that stop you understanding what the teacher says ?

B- by by making me move by not sitting still

T- Right do you find it difficult to listen what you don't sit still ?

B- Um (*yes*)

T- Is that something that you get in trouble for ?

B- Yes.

T- So does Mrs. W. ever call you a fidget or something ?

B- Yes (*Belinda laughs loudly - transcription note*)

These are just two examples but do serve to illustrate some of the points made. In both cases the children had their own ideas of what they found difficult and could explain why they found them difficult. Both perceptions were coherent and led the child to behave in a certain way. However, what is perhaps most significant is that in both of these explanations the child's priority concern was not the concern the teacher identified when asked. For Greta and Belinda's teachers the major concern was behaviour not the issues that the children believed that caused the disruptive behaviour. At the very least, gaining the child's perception in both examples could provide a valuable insight into what aspects the child felt were priorities to tackle and how to work with the child to alleviate those difficulties.

(iii) the children's response to the support process

What has been seen so far is that, for a variety of reasons, the children within the sample had little involvement in defining their needs or developing support for them. One of the interesting aspects of these the interviews was the ways in which the children responded to this. One might expect them to be passive and simply expect them to accept the role assigned for them. In some cases this was true. For example Eddy simply accepted the way that the

school dealt with his behavioural needs,

E- If you cross off one (*a smiley face*) that means it's only a chance from the teacher, if you cross off two that means I go to Mr. L. (*the headteacher*) and when you cross off three then I go home.

T- So when you go to two and you go to Mr. L. what happens there ?

E- Then he just has a talk to me and then I go back into the class.

T- What sort of things does he say to you ?

E- Don't do it again.

T- Does that help you ?

E- Yeah ... it helps me not do it again.

T- Do you get sent home often ?

E- Only that one time remember ?

While he did not enjoy being sent to the headteacher to work in isolation (this was one of his support structures to attempt to give him the chance to calm down and then be re-integrated into the class) he raised no objections and accepted it as a part of his life at school.

Others were not so accepting. As has been discussed earlier, Greta felt that her teacher was not going to be able to help her with her loss of temper in school. As a result when she sought help with her temper she approached another teacher. This was so even when she lost her temper within her own class. She sought out the teacher at breaktimes to gain the support she felt she needed. It is interesting to note that when asked at a later date why she approached this particular teacher, her response was unequivocal,

"I like him. He helps me when I get mad. He listens and he always helps me get it sorted out."

However, the most interesting response was that of Henry. While in many ways he accepted the teacher's perception of his difficulties (as reported to him sometimes by his mother) and the tasks set for him in school and at home, he did object to where the support took place in school. This varied with his perception of how he felt his friends viewed him. However, the

teacher had decided that he should be withdrawn from the class. Henry decided to make a protest about this and refused to leave the classroom. As Classroom Assistant ii., who was working with Henry at the time, explained,

" I was told that it was that sometimes he doesn't want to come out of the class, that he wants to stay in and work within the classroom environment. So that is why we came up with that compromise. I did say to Henry before I discuss this with his teacher and Kim (*the outside professional involved with him*) , well I can't make that decision, we will have to talk to your teacher about it because I have been told that I have to bring you out we decided to have a compromise.. I suppose we were able to do part in and part out, it is better than nothing so I wouldn't automatically go in and say we are staying in today, I would say are we going to stay in or are we going out ?"

(Appendix 1, page 47)

In effect Henry had responded by protesting and had managed to persuade the classroom assistant working with him to negotiate an option that gave him a choice in where he worked. This ability to choose where he received his additional support continued when he changed class. Later, by protesting in a similar fashion, he was also able to negotiate with a different classroom assistant (Assistant iii.) which order he completed the tasks set for him.

This process of negotiation was only present in the interview with Henry and it is evident from the interviews of both Henry and the classroom assistant that much of what was negotiated was the result of the assistant being willing to consider Henry's views. Further, the actual decision was taken by the teacher and the outside professional involved in the case. It was also concerning what might be considered a peripheral, if important, part of the support programme.

A final question that is of interest here is why the children were often so accepting of the strategies employed to help them. Part of this appears to be that the children generally did not

perceive such strategies as specific to them (as discussed earlier). However, another hint can be found in some comments made by Devi in her interview,

T- Do the teachers know that you get headaches (*Devi's explanation of why she often finds it difficult to concentrate*) ?

D- Yes. Ms. P. and Mr G. (*a student teacher at the time*) know that I got migraines.

T- How do they know ?

D- My mum told them.

Although this was the only comment of this type it might be that because the children knew that their parents and the teacher talked there was a presumption that their parents would have put forward the children's views of their difficulties. If the teachers knew then they would be taken into account.

(iv) the impact of ethnicity.

Within the interview data hardly any mention was made by the children concerning the issue of the impact of ethnicity. Indeed it was only in the area of the understanding of English that the area was raised by two of the children:

" I don't mean that I don't listen. I do. It's just that sometimes I don't understand the words. They don't make sense. I get mixed up and I don't learn."

(Devi, Appendix 2, page 79, additional note).

T- Do you speak Punjabi at home with your mum and dad ?

C- Yes.

T- You speak English with your teachers (*Chandani nodded head - transcription note*)

Do you speak Punjabi with Anita (*her best friend in class who helps her*) ?

C- No.

T- You speak English with Anita ?

C- Yes.

T- Do you find it difficult sometimes ... sometimes speaking in Punjabi and sometimes in English ?

C- Yes (*very quietly*)

Chandani.

It would appear from this very limited evidence that the children were reluctant to admit their needs in terms of their bilingualism. However, because they appeared not to be having difficulties in this area, and they did not express this difficulty themselves, this possibly tended to be overlooked by the teachers.

The effect of the IEP on the relationships.

The IEP as a document has already been seen to have had little direct effect on the relationships discussed. This was because information concerning the difficulties the children were experiencing and the way they were to be met was not discussed in terms of being collated onto a specific document.

Indeed there were only one occasion when discussion about a child's IEP arose in the course of the interviews with parents and that was when I raised the matter,

T- Have you ever seen Adam's Individual Education Plan ?

A- His what ?

T- Right.

A- No, I've

T- Which you have obviously never seen

A- I didn't even know that there was a form like that.

And later in the same interview, after I had explained a little about what an IEP is,

A- So is that what Ms. P. (*her son's teacher*) would have done at the beginning when he started in his class what she is going to do with him ?

T- She'll have a Stage 1 sheet, yes and it has things on it like what Adam is good at and what he finds difficult ... um things like if there are any medical problems ... it's really an information collecting thing

A- No, I didn't know about that.

T- I'm sure if you ask ...

A- What's it called ?

T- It's called an IEP ... an Individual Education Plan.

A- I didn't know you learn something new every day (*both laugh out of embarrassment - transcription note*).

Parent A - as part of a discussion about how the school informed her about what they felt were Adam's difficulties.

In most cases when parents described meetings with teachers to discuss difficulties their children were experiencing they followed a pattern of "discussion" and an informal agreeing of what to do. Typical of these was a meeting described by Parent B,

B- I have spoken to her teacher Mrs. N. (*actually her previous teacher*) ...

I have spoken to her and we arranged for like Belinda to see how she would get on working by herself and she seems to work better ... she seems to work better when she works by herself like when there is nobody around her and nobody to distract.

T- And who thought of that idea ... was that Mrs. N. or was that yourself ?

B- I think that it was both of us.

T- So did you have a meeting after school or ...

B- No, I wouldn't say a meeting but just where she asked me if I can stop and talk a minute or she can have a word with me ?

In most cases the role that the parents perceived themselves as having within this discussion process was that of supporter of what the teacher suggested. With the children, as has been discussed before, few of them were aware of any special help being provided for them and

none had been involved in planning such help. As such the IEP, and process by which it was designed, was a completely unknown element to the children.

The process by which the IEP was designed, the IEP itself and the way that it was used within the school studied may have had little direct effect on the relationships. However, the underlying effect that it had on the perceptions of the teachers cannot be ignored. It appears to have affected both the teachers' approach to special needs and to the relationships they formed both with the parents and the children themselves. Taken together they served to re-inforce the view teachers had of themselves and their role. This was so in at least three ways:

(a) it served to enhance a separation between the mainstream curriculum on offer to all the children and the elements of the additional help on offer to children experiencing difficulties at school. This was so both in the teachers' thinking but also in the practical day to day running of most of the classes.

This was so because of the mainstream curriculum offered to the class and the way that the teachers appear to have perceived the process of the IEP should interact with this. The curriculum offered to the class was believed to be something that was largely fixed,

"in this day and age the curriculum is set isn't it ... so whether we like it or not we have to give out that dose so, with experience you and I both know we can moderate it to a certain extent to the abilities of the children"

Teacher 5.

"If I am teaching the whole class and I feel what I am teaching the whole class is going to be difficult like this work I am doing with Andre (*a child with a Statement - transcription note*) a lot of what I am doing with the whole class is almost irrelevant. He picks up on some things but he needs to be taken off and

the same information given to him in a different way. I can't do two lessons - I haven't got time to do that"

Teacher 2 - explaining how the needs of one child might affect the way that she teaches her class.

In effect the curriculum is for the majority of the class. While it may be moderated to a certain extent such differentiation may not allow a minority to access it. A different approach was believed to be needed for those considered to have special needs - even at the earlier stages of the Code of Practice being considered within this study.

This belief about the applicability of the curriculum appears to interact with the teacher's approach to meeting those minority needs. This is the approach to forming the IEP, as this is the document that contains both a description of those needs and the plan to meet the,

".... you are really just looking at triggers when you have got a child in front of you and you realise that they are not quite with the rest of the class and the general average of the class lets say and you think what are the concerns?"

And later,

"the one that is the most successful is the one that makes priorities because there are several things that you can do to help that child in whatever area you have identified as being of concern"

Teacher 5. - explaining her approach to forming IEPs.

"I think it is to pinpoint a child who's initially you alight on and just seems to have a difficulty whatever that might be and then you pinpoint and try to be

specific about that difficulty and then you try and break down well, what can we do to help that child overcome that difficulty ?"

Teacher 2 - explaining her approach to forming IEPs.

"I think the idea of reviewing what the children are doing in terms of their learning identifying at a period of time what strengths the children are showing, what priority concerns there are and which bits are the things that you would like them to learn you think that they can learn next and identify that thing .. the small or manageable steps for the children. I think that that is good teaching I think that that is generally good teaching. But I think that is it perhaps absolutely vital for special needs children that you do very, very clearly identify what steps you are expecting them to try and make up."

SENCo - explaining the perceived benefits of the IEP.

In effect children who are having difficulties in coping with the class curriculum are seen as something separate from the class as a whole. They need to be assessed and targets set. This process was seen as good practice generally, but particularly so in the case of children experiencing difficulties. With the curriculum being perceived as a fixed constant the children experiencing difficulties have to be supported in a way that is outside, or additional, to that curriculum. As Teacher 2. commented,

"I can't do two lessons - I haven't got time to do that"

So how were these children and their additional needs catered for ? The answer appears to lie in the fact that these assessments and targets were collated onto a specific document and how this process has led to the resourcing of those targets to support the child's learning. This can be most clearly seen in the way in which the teachers described how they set about practically resourcing the IEP:

"I think it is important that you don't try and do too much on an IEP. If the school had fewer children with IEPs then perhaps you could do more,

because perhaps you could use your support staff to do that more often with the child but I don't let timetable restrictions restrict me if you know what I mean .. I always feel, well obviously in the end they will have to but, I feel to begin with you should just put down who will do it and when, when you have identified what you are going to do to meet that need and then I would tend to then I timetable it and I make it fit in somehow or another, it has got to fit in."

Teacher 4. - explaining how she practically resources children's additional needs.

"I just first of all see who is going to be in the class ... what the support staff are and what time they've got and basically I look at what we plan to do with that child and put that work into be done either my time is free, it might be first thing in the morning if the rest of the class are doing look, cover, spell, checkit's literally a matter of taking small bits of work when you have got the support to do that"

Teacher 2. - explaining how she practically resources children's additional needs.

"Well, it's like with any IEP if there was someone to run it completely every single minute of the day it would have the most benefit. But if it is something that can only be fitted in when you have time I mean that if it were a perfect class and they got on with what they were meant to do then yes there would be time"

Teacher 1. - explaining why Devi's IEP was often not fully implemented.

Within these quotations a general theme can be drawn out. With the use of an additional document to record the child's needs, and the targets set to meet them, the teachers have been drawn into the perception that such a plan forms an additional element to the work of the

class. Such additional work is to be fitted into spare slots in the working day of the class, or allocated to classroom assistants to teach. Rather than the IEP being used to plan how to include those experiencing difficulties in the whole class's work the use of an additional, separate document has resulted in an additional, separate element being added to the child's work. In effect then in the teachers' minds if you have an IEP you need an additional, and separate, strand to be added to the curriculum that you receive within the class.

(b) it helped to define the type of additional curriculum that was on offer to children experiencing difficulties in the school.

It has already been argued that the use of the IEP tended to result in an additional strand to the child's curriculum that was individual in nature. It focused on a specific child with specific needs. It has also been argued that because it was specific it tended to be carried out in isolation either with the time given to implement it, the support given in terms of a classroom assistant, or by removal to another place to complete the tasks set.

However, a further element also appears to have helped to define the type of additional support offered to the child. This was the type of targets set. These had two elements to them. Firstly the targets had to be such that they could be broken down, or partitioned, into small steps,

"I suppose that it is important in that the targets need to be set and if there is an underachievement you can break down the requirements you can, sort of ... partition, make smaller the targets"

Teacher 3. - explaining her approach to deciding on targets to choose.

Secondly, because the target setting was approached in this way a certain type of target tended to be considered to be most appropriate,

"I think that an IEP is generally the improvement of skills and knowledge rather than no, that is not true is it because attitudes and concepts can go down ... but it tends to be skill and knowledge based these things.

I think that is a bit unfortunate sometimes because concepts and attitudes, to me, are equally important as skills and knowledge and that gets lost sometimes"

Teacher 4. - explaining the type of targets which are expected to be on her IEPs.

In effect, then, the type of targets set tend to focus on what is testable and assessable . The children need to be able to demonstrate that they can do it. Such targets will tend to be contained within additional packages of work that, if completed and the target achieved, will allow the child to "catch up" with the others in the class, or as Teacher 3. put it,

"bringing that child up to that particular standard that is required by our school .. you know with the (*yearly*) targets that we have set and with the National Curriculum targets themselves."

(c) it served to enhance the status of the teacher at the expense of that of the parents and the children.

One of the most striking aspects of the approach taken to meeting a child's special needs by the teachers here is that the process is focused on the child's learning within school and the need to make an "educational" response to those needs. This response is seen as a technical one relying on educational assessment,

"I would use some of the diagnostic packs that are available in schools now in terms of word recognition, shape, whatever motor co-ordination you name it, whatever, goodness knows and of course the records of the child are very important"

Teacher 5. - explaining her initial approach to assessing a child's special needs.

"educational (*needs*) sort of linked in with ability but taking it further ... taking it into sort of national tests so that a sort of Year 2 or a Year 6 child you realise that they are underachieving at that time the tests might make it clear to you that that child has further special needs."

Teacher 3. - explaining what evidence she might look for in assessing whether a child had special needs.

This form of data collection is one that the teacher is clearly going to have the most immediate access to and the greatest competency in working with. In contrast, the parents have already been seen to lack information even on the rudimentary aspects of how the classroom operates. Without teacher explanation it has to be questioned whether such data would be easily understandable. This puts the parent in a position which is dependant on the teacher - both to give them access to the information and to explain clearly what it means. This can be presented in such a way which allows a genuine choice of action based on supporting evidence for a proposed course of action on the part of the teacher. Consequently, how the teacher provides such information is a major influence on whether the parent, or child, have a genuine voice in the decision making process.

This dependency on "educational" data also needs to be linked to the approach to target setting outlined earlier. The process of breaking a broad goal into a set of small, step-like and measurable targets was seen as a peculiarly educational one by the teachers interviewed. This approach was perceived as difficult for teachers, let alone parents or the children themselves,

"... it is a very specific thing and it is quite difficult for us to get our heads round even and then if the steps have been broken down and then the targets are there that we are aiming at then that would probably be the stage to bring in the parent."

Teacher 3.- explaining when she would involve parents in a discussion of a child's special needs.

Consequently, the area of planning the additional help that the child was to receive was perceived by the teachers as being outside the capabilities of most parents. Because of this little attempt was made to explain this process to parents, and, hence, to involve them in it in a meaningful way.

In effect, then, by focusing on the educational dependency of the parent or child on the teacher was enhanced. On the one hand this was because of the dependency on the teacher to provide access to, and interpret data. On the other hand it was achieved by forcing the parent or child to depend on the planning skills of the teacher. This served to both enhance the relative status of the teacher in the teacher's perception, while enhancing the relative dependency of the parent or child in their own perception. It is this dual perception of dependency that appears to have led to the tendency to see the teacher's role of an informer, and the parent's or child's as supporter.

This tendency appears also to be enhanced by a further striking aspect that can be seen from the quotations used within this section. The teachers appear to have perceived the IEP in a homogenous way. That is that as the diagnostic and detailed target setting aspects of the process required a certain specialist approach, and this was the domain of the teacher, this approach was then applied to all aspects of the IEP process. This further helped to lead the teacher to perceive the role of the parent and child to be a peripheral one because of their lack of such specialist skills and knowledge.

A final element that needs to be considered here is the context in which these perceptions of roles were being developed. Little mention was made within the interviews of the policies that the school followed, or the in-service training that staff had received. However, given that each teacher had access both to the school and LEA's policy documents and had received some in-service training based on them it is worth considering for a moment the approach put forward at this level.

At a policy level, both the LEA (Birmingham SEN Strategies Handbook, 1996) and the school policy (Special Needs Policy, 1996) documents use similar language. While they do make statements concerning the importance of the role of the parents,

"parents of children with special educational needs should be fully involved as partners in any decision about their child's education"

Handbook, 1996, Page 2, 3.1(f)

they are less specific about the role of the child,

"Developments should be in close consultation and partnership with a child's parent(s) and should consider the wishes and feelings of the child."

Handbook, 1996, part 1, page 1.

Further, when describing the specifics of drawing together the IEP itself the advice given in the Handbook (ibid.) reduces the role of the parent to one of being informed,

"The child's parents should always be kept informed of the action that the school proposes to take and any help that they can give at home"

Handbook, 1996, part 1, page 58.

In the case of involving the child no advice is given at this stage of the process either in the LEA Handbook, or the school policy.

What is noticeable within both documents is the overwhelming proportion of the documents dedicated to describing how to design an IEP and the criteria to use in deciding what should be included within the IEP. Both documents have a focus on the use of targets that are stepped and measurable - these are referred to as SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, realistic, Time Scaled) targets within both documents (Handbook, part 1, page 59 and SEN Policy page 3). Both documents also suggest that comparative measures such as progress within the appropriate National Curriculum Level Descriptors and Birmingham Positive Statement Banks should be used to decide whether a child has special needs (Handbook, part 1, pages 12, 19 - 26 and SEN Policy page 3).

This predominant focus on the technical aspects of IEP design and the use of educational data as the cornerstone of decision making can also be seen within the in-service training given to teachers at the school. Indeed, only one such session of in-service training had been provided for the teachers during the period leading up to the study and during it (which I attended as a class teacher). This was entitled "How to write the perfect IEP" and had been presented by the school's SENCo after attending an LEA training course of the same name. The focus was exclusively on how to write an IEP with a heavy emphasis on ensuring that targets set were SMART ones. No mention during this meeting was made of involving either the parent or the child in the decision making process.

One final point that should be noted at this policy level was that there was an awareness on the part of the teachers that how they designed their IEPs might affect their chances of accessing further support from the LEA at a later date,

"it's also used obviously if you think that the child has got a major problem to show the authorities that you are identifying the problem and doing what you can so at a later date you can say that you have done this but now it is beyond our means."

Teacher 2. - during her explanation of the purpose of the IEP.

While it is unlikely that the LEA meant their guidance to be interpreted in the form that it appears to have been in the school studied here, the overwhelming focus on assessment and target setting and the relative lack of focus on involving the child and parents appears to have served to reinforce the already underlying beliefs of the teachers interviewed. It is perhaps a mute question to ask how much influence such documentation actually has on the underlying perceptions of teachers. However, at the very least, it must be recognised that the approach of the documentation had some impact on what the teachers felt were the expectations on them. As such they can be seen as at least supporting and legitimising the views of the teacher, both about the process of IEP design and the involvement of the parent and child.

Chapter 5 - Patterns of interaction.

Introduction.

In the previous chapter data from the study was analysed by focusing on the perceptions of each group of the participants - the teachers, the parents and the children themselves. In this chapter I will look at how these perceptions developed into the relationships that they did in practice. However, it should be remembered that relationships are a dynamic process. As such the chapter will also seek to draw out how the type of interaction that took place influenced the perceptions that each participant to the relationship held.

Three types of relationship.

Within the sample three broad types of relationships can be teased out:

- (i) the "involving" - relationships where all the participants perceived themselves to be involved,
- (ii) the "neutral" - relationships where the participants had concerns about the level of involvement but where there was no major breakdown, or confrontation, in the relationship, and
- (iii) the "non-involving" - relationships where there were major concerns about the level of involvement and where the relationship had largely broken down.

I propose to take a single, representative example from each type to explore the key factors that appear to underlie the way in which that type of relationship functioned. To help draw out the key perspectives and experiences in each of these relationships I have drawn together key quotations from each of the interviews discussed. I have chosen to group these quotations under the four generic areas that Bastiani (1993) argues are the basis of any partnership relationship in education (these criteria were discussed in detail in Chapter 2).

(i) The involving.

The most striking example of this type is the relationship surrounding the child Henry. This relationship had had a difficult, and often confrontational, past. However at the time of the interviews the relationships appeared to be both involving and successful in terms of the commitment shown to it by the teacher, parent and the child themselves.

Figure 5.1 - Table of quotations relating to the perspectives and experiences of the Henry grouping

	Parent Perspectives	Child Perspectives	Teacher Perspectives
Causes of difficulty	I wouldn't say that he finds it (<i>work</i>) difficult it's the way that he has been taught that he finds difficult.	T- What makes you lose your temper (in class) ? H- When I do spellings right and I can't spell and I tell the teacher and the teacher is working with other people.	I think she (<i>Parent H</i>) sort of blames things that have happened in the past or didn't happen in the past in his education ... he wasn't picked up early enough or that he wasn't ... he was left to his own devices rather than pushed.
	In my day the way I was taught it it was literally ... it was no imagination or whatever and using your own initiative which he doesn't ... he finds that hard.	T- So what does she do H- Well, sometimes I lose my temper T- So do you lose your temper because she wont help or because you can't do the spellings ?	She (<i>an outside professional</i>) thinks that it is a question of confidence ... which I didn't think it was and neither did his mum, but as time has gone on we actually think that she was right. So we decided that she probably is an expert after all and we're not.
	He's catching on to the way that he is being taught now and what he is actually supposed to be doing.	H- Because I can't do the spellings	
	He is kind of like more a seeing person . If you are talking and he can't actually see it it's hard for him to understand ..	H- I used to kick the chairs a lot It's my thinking	
		Because I talk to my friends too much	This bit about concentration .. he cannot physically listen in a whole class situation.
Roles within relationship	She'll (<i>the teacher</i>) say well he's had difficulty in this section of work and I'll take that section home and I'll take that section home and more or less he will breeze through it because he hasn' got that distraction.	They do the work with me again Normally I read my book and do my homework	The <i>SENCo</i> has certainly advised her how to go about pushing for it (<i>extra help in class</i>) who to speak to. And she has come to the meetings with Kim (<i>outside professional involved in assessing Henry</i>) and she comes at the end of the day to check on him usually.
	I help more at home now because the teaching is gelling with what I do at home anyway so it is just a case of not putting that emphasis on it but just helping, you know, pushing him in the right direction.		I talked with Henry's mum about this (<i>the outside professional's views</i>) and said well I have changed my mind and she said yes, perhaps she was right about some of it.

Communication	I did approach them and nothing wasn't done. It's not to say I didn't try and when I did see that there was a problem I did tell them They told me that wasn't a problem.	Sometimes they say it back to me ... that I need a bit more work and that.	I'm very keen to tell her all the positives but I don't want her to think that he is going to suddenly catch up.
	Meetings, meetings after school and me asking when they didn't tell me.	T- How does she know (<i>what you find difficult</i>) ? H- She (<i>the teacher</i>) can see.	She is quite good in the sense that it is her child and it doesn't really matter what anyone else thinks. I haven't ever got the impression that she wants to talk privately because certainly she knows that she could ask me and I would arrange another time.
	I come in every so often in the week and I'll ask how he has been doing and what not ...		
Level of involvement in planning to meet the child's needs	They brought in somebody else out to assess him and she caught on right away ... exactly what I was saying for two or three years ... you know ?	Conversation with a classroom assistant who works with Henry (<i>Classroom Assistant ii</i>) I was told that it was that sometimes he doesn't want to come out of the class, that he wants to stay in and work within the classroom environment. So that is why we came up with that compromise. I did say to Henry before I discuss this with his teacher and Pat (the outside professional involved with him) , well I can't make that decision we will have to talk to your teacher about it because I have been told that I have to bring you out we decided to have a compromise.. I suppose we were able to do part in and part out. it is better than nothing so I wouldn't automatically go in and say we are staying in today, I would say are we going to stay in or are we going out ?"	When I spoke to her about his reading obviously wasn't moving and he said that he hadn't read at home I asked her and she said no she hadn't been able to hear him. As far as I know, this is the impression that I get, that she is very pleased that he has made little bits of progress and she has been very supportive to me and Mr L. (<i>the SENCo</i>).
	He had three and a half hours and they want to increase it to seven and a half hours ... um ... I think that they have more concentrated on his spellings and his reading more than his maths.		

A number of aspects of the way in which the parent, child and teacher view their relationships with each other are striking.

Firstly, there appears to have been a common agenda and objective at the outset of the relationship. Both the teacher and the parent are concerned that Henry's needs have not been adequately met in the past. Henry was clearly unhappy about the way in which he felt that he was being treated. A new solution needs to be found from the route taken with the previous teacher.

This common agenda appears not to have been hindered by the perceptions that they have of Henry's difficulties. They focus on different reasons - Parent H. on the previous teacher's

style of teaching, Teacher 1 on a lack of confidence and a "physical" inability to concentrate, and Henry both on teachers ignoring him and his difficulty in thinking. However, crucially, they do not imply any fault in the other. Each is predisposed to look on the other in a positive light. Even where there is criticism of the school, as in the case both of Parent H and Henry, this is focused on the teaching style of the previous teacher and the resentment from this previous relationship does not appear to have leaked into the present one. Indeed it appears to have acted as a focus to find a new solution for Henry, which has been used to bring the participants together into the present strong relationship.

Secondly, a clear process of open discussion has taken place in which both teacher and parent feel that they are involved (if not equally) and their views valued. This process was more hard won by Henry, but at the time of the data collection he also had a clear route through which to voice his concerns and perceives that he will be listened to. This process has largely been guided by the diagnosis of the outside professional assessing Henry. Discussion of this diagnosis has allowed the teacher and parent to reach a consensus and learn to trust each other and to view each other as genuinely supportive.

Thirdly, the parent has access to enough information to help her to feel that she is making an informed decision about how well her son's needs are being met. This is partly through the teacher and partly through the SENCo. Henry also appears to feel that he has access to information about what he has to do through his mother.

Fourthly, there is a frequent and open dialogue between the teacher and parent concerning Henry's needs, his progress within the classroom curriculum and the additional work he is set, and how best to support him. While such meetings are semi-public in nature this is a context in which the parent is comfortable discussing her child. For the teacher, such contact is welcomed and the support offered as seen as genuinely helpful to Henry. As such she does not see such frequent contact as an undue intrusion on her time. Henry also feels that he has the ability to influence the parts of the discussion that he perceives as important. The result of this is that all three feel that they have a defined role which is valued and making a difference to meeting Henry's needs.

Fifthly, while the overarching analysis and planning has been achieved by discussion the formal target setting and recording this on to the official document (the IEP) are written by the teacher. This has allowed the teacher to fulfil what they perceive to be their professional role without leaving the parent and child feeling excluded and their views ignored.

(ii) The neutral.

A typical example of this pattern of interaction is that of the relationships relating to the child Devi.

Figure 5.2 - Table of quotations relating to the perspectives and experiences of the Devi grouping.

	Parent perspectives	Child perspectives	Teacher perspectives
Causes of difficulty	I mean I am her mother so I know what but she needs a lot of push.	A- You feel worried ... what worries you ? D- Teachers shouting at me.	She switches off. Or she did switch off, she's more able to concentrate but not as high as I would like
	She gives up really quickly, yes, she does...	A- So why do you think that you don't understand (<i>what the teacher says</i>) ? D- Because I have got migraines.	She has always been like that. Nothing would make her hurry, nothing.
			She doesn't have any sort of general knowledge I would say. She doesn't have this background that would help her. Possibly she just doesn't have the experiences that she would need.
Roles within relationship	First thing I ask them when they come back from Mosque is have you got homework ... have you got a reading book you know I always help them as much as I can	A- Do they ever ask you if you have got one (<i>a migraine</i>) ? D- Yes, sometimes when I be ill they ask me.	She is quite open, or she seems to be. And if I have sent homework home and Devi has had problems with it she will come back and say that. or she will say that she has a go at trying to get her to do things.
	I even went into town to W.H Smiths ... I bought her some of those books		

Communication

I know the way that she is in class because I communicate a lot with the teachers as well. A- Do your teachers know that you get headaches ? D- Yes. Ms. P. and Mr. G (a student) know that I got migraines.

I think that she does be quite good in class because Ms. G. (her teacher) says that she does be good. A- How do they know ? D- My mum told them.

I come to parents' evening. A- So does the teacher ever tell your mum and dad what you find difficult at school ? D- Just my mum. My dad don't collect me.

I can't say that they tell you everything but it's a matter of us we're the parents like me I always have to ask

I feel embarrassed that they are having to be told this (*about their child's difficulties*) in front of other parents, who are obviously listening because you are always trying to measure your child against somebody else.

Occasionally she has asked how she is getting on .. other times it has been in response to something ... her reading book or whatever or if I initiate a conversation it is usually to say what she has done, to say that I am pleased with her reading or whatever.

Level of involvement in planning to meet the child's needs

She is a very open person she's very nice and quite bubbly very talkative. very talkative

She (*mother*) does support her and do things if I ask.

I had them (*IEPs for Devi*) with me but no-one seemed to be ver interested so i went back to just saying that they had extra help I mean I don't think any of them would know what IEP meant, because we all talk about these ridiculous codes.

Again, a number of aspects of the way in which the parent, child and teacher view their relationships with each other are striking.

Firstly, unlike the "involving" relationship, there appears to have been no common agenda or objective at the beginning of the relationship. The parent is largely unaware that her child is considered to have special needs. However, as such, there is no pressing concern on her part to gain immediate action and the teacher has been left free to meet the child's needs in the way that she sees as appropriate. On Devi's part there is little awareness of concern over her progress.

This lack of concern appears to have been bolstered by the perceptions that each has of the causes of Devi's difficulties. The reasons given are very different but, again, they do not imply any fault in the other. While the teacher's analysis does imply that some of the difficulty lies within the home (the general lack of experiences) this is not put forward

critically, but rather in a paternalistic way which simply sees the school as a compensator for inevitable deficiencies in the home. The result is not so much blame as an understanding, if not quite neutral, acceptance.

Secondly, there appears to have been very little in the way of discussion about Devi's needs and to have been a major issue of miscommunication within the relationship between the parent and the teacher. The teacher feels that they have informed the parent and that the parent is actively supporting her child in the areas that have been suggested. The parent perceives that while Devi brings home homework to do, such an explanation and request for support has not taken place. The reason for this difference is uncertain but the parent appears to have gained a very different message from attending parents' evening than was intended by the class teacher. However, with the parent having no pressing concerns about her child's progress the need to discuss is very low.

Devi, for her part, appears to have no idea that the teacher is concerned about her progress and views any additional support that she receives in the classroom as a normal part of the classroom routine. Where there is a concern regarding her migraines there is a belief that the teacher is aware of her needs because her parents have already explained them to the teacher. Devi's fear of being shouted at only serves to enhance the unlikelihood of her expressing her views. This passive response to the teacher has allowed the teacher to interpret such a response as acceptance of what is being provided to help her with her difficulties.

Thirdly, the day to day contact between the teacher and parent also appears to have been largely unsuccessful as a source of ongoing information. The teacher perceives that there is an open discussion with an attempt to provide information about both Devi's needs and her general progress. The parent perceives that she will only receive information if she asks. This obviously irritates the parent. However, this is mediated by the parent's lack of pressing concern and the belief that if she wishes to know anything the teacher's response will be helpful and friendly. The teacher does not initiate contact because she believes that if the parent is unhappy or wanted to know anything she would say so. In essence, then, the concerns have become hidden by presumptions on all sides that the other knows and accepts the views of the other.

Fourthly, the parent has little or no conception that there is a formal document that records her child's needs and any planning to help meet those needs. This leaves the teacher free to fulfil what they perceive to be their specialist role and the parent unconcerned about their level of involvement in this process. This division in roles has been enhanced in the teacher's mind by the perceived parental lack of interest when she has tried to discuss this document.

(iii) The non-involving.

The only example of this type of relationship within the sample was that of the interaction relating to the child Belinda. This pattern was, however, mirrored in discussions with Parent H. concerning her relationship with a different teacher earlier in Henry's school career.

Figure 5.3 Table of quotations relating to the perspectives and experiences of the Belinda grouping.

	Parents perspectives	Child's perspectives	Teacher's perspectives
Causes of difficulty	The reason why I say that she finds it being good in class is because when I go to pick her up the teacher always says oh she has been very upperty today.	T- What about understanding what the teacher says ? B- That I feel sweaty and need to move about. T- So you find it difficult to sit still ? B- Yes.	Her IEP is based mainly on social skills ... learning to be good.
	She can't really sit down in one place for very long in one place without messing about or distracting somebody else.		You have to assume that if adults are behaving like that, that is what they have witnessed and have decided that's how you deal with it...
	I felt that she was being picked on ... and I wasn't really happy with that ... I was keeping being told negative things. I wasn't being told anything positive so I felt like she was being picked on.		
	Some of the things that she probably did in class you know it was minor, it didn't have to be made out to be something ... you know, really big		

Roles within relationship

And when she gets home I have to speak to her ... I have to tell her off and things like that to let her know that it is not good ... um ... so, it's not really nice

T- And how do you decide what your target (*for that week*) is ?

B- Um someone else decides for me

Ask the children first if you get stuck. that's what they say to me.

I usually talk to the parents at parents' evening about ... like they are informed that their child has now got a need and what we are doing with them .. and is that OK with them

Communication

... it is not very nice coming into school knowing that she hasn't been good throughout the whole of the week and things like that.

T- Do you feel that you are rushed ?

B- Yes, because straight after I come for Belinda I have to head off and go to work.

T- So you felt that they put it (*information about Belinda*) across as if they were cross with you as well ?

B- Yes perhaps they can talk to me in a friendlier way.

She (*Belinda*) does get help with sort of chat about what I expect at the start of the day and I speak with mum at the end of the day.

T- You said that you tell mum at the end of the day

2- Yes if I see mum.

T- Is that your main time of contact ?

2- Yes

T- And does mum come to Parent's Evening ?

2- The last time it was Belinda's step-dad who came. But, yes, it is mum or dad who do come to parents' evening

T- Do you think that mum or step-dad are happy with the contact that they have with school ?

2- I think so, yes. They haven't said otherwise.

Level of involvement in planning to meet the child's needs.

Ms. F. (*a previous teacher*) ... me and her sat down and she thought of a suggestion to help Belinda. That was if she got 10 stickers ... Ms. K. (*Belinda's present teacher*) is doing it as well if she gets a certain amount of stickers then she gets a prize at the end of the week ... which I thought was pretty nice.

T- Has Ms. K. or a teacher asked you what you find difficult ?

B- No.

T- So do you think Ms. K. knows what you think ?

B- Yes..... because I don't know spellings and I have to ask her.

T- And would you involve the child themselves ?

2- I haven't done, but I can see no ... I think if the child was aware. I mean to say there is no reason why you couldn't say well you seem to have a bit of a problem with your letter formation

She (*mother*) is not really interested. She just wants to know that Belinda has been good and if she hasn't what she has done wrong.

Again, a number of aspects of the way in which the parent, child and teacher view their relationships with each other can be drawn out.

Firstly, while there is some commonality on the issue to be addressed (Belinda's behaviour) this is overwhelmed by the perceptions of why she is exhibiting this behaviour in the first place. The analyses of the difficulties bring the teacher into direct conflict with the parent and her child. The teacher locates the issue as one that derives from the home, whereas the parent and child focus on the teaching style of the teacher and the way that they manage what they perceive as fairly minor incidents of behaviour. While none have openly expressed these views to the other the emphasis on blaming the other has meant that the relationship has become based on mistrust of each other's motives and a lack of value in each other's views. Unlike the "involving" relationship this appears to have allowed the negative perceptions built up with previous teachers to enhance the present feelings of mistrust.

Secondly, there appears to have been an almost complete lack of genuine discussion with, and involvement of, the parent and the child. Information is presented in the form of a "*fait accompli*" without the information or opportunity to respond effectively. This appears to have been exaggerated by the semi-public nature of meetings between especially the parent and teacher and the belief on the part of the parent that she has to initiate any contact in the first place. This is not helped by the fact that the parent has to initiate such contact at a time when she feels rushed because she has to get to work after collecting Belinda.

This approach to interaction by the teacher appears to have two effects in this case. Firstly, by not allowing discussion of the core issues of the decision making the conflictual views held by all the participants have been allowed to become more and more fixed. This has built up an expectation of a negative response when interaction does take place and serves to harden views still further. As such, useful and genuine discussion has been filtered out.

Secondly, because the parent is seen as part of the problem along with the child little effort has been made to negotiate a role for them. This has meant that the parent and child have had to try and interpret their role. For Parent B. this means that she perceives she must reprimand Belinda for her poor behaviour. She dislikes this role and this appears to fuel her resentment toward the teacher. However, even more importantly, this attempt to support the teacher has been interpreted as further proof of the inadequacies of the parent by the teacher. Again this has only served to harden the perceptions held. Similarly with Belinda, she is attempting to use a strategy that she feels that she has been taught to use - ask a friend if you are stuck.

However, the teacher appears to be interpreting this as another example of her inability to follow the rules of the classroom, thus emphasising the need for the approach that she is taking.

Thirdly, the parent and child have little or no conception that there is a formal document that records the child's needs and how these are to be met. Effectively, then, they are excluded both at the core decision making and practical everyday levels of the decision making process. Again this leaves the teacher to fulfil what they believe to be their specialist role to be. This serves to further enhance the teacher's view that they are the person who has the ability to define those needs and the solution to them.

Some key points which affected how involving the relationship was.

From this exploration of the types of relationship that were present in the data a number of key points have emerged. These points are ones which appear to have a significant impact on whether the relationship is genuinely involving and allow it to function to help the child:

- 1) An initial common agenda appears crucial. It develops an initial level of trust and prompts a desire to actively work together.
- 2) Less important appears to be the analysis of the difficulties. This is because they were seldom made explicit. However, where no common agenda is developed an analysis which is conflictual does appear to significantly undermine the level of trust each brings to the relationship.
- 3) Another crucial element appears to be a commitment to open discussion, both at the start of the relationship and on an ongoing basis. This appears to help a feeling of value to develop. However, it is also clear this often happens only because parents initiate it and then only when a sense of concern exceeds the feeling of irritation at not being kept informed. For the teachers there seems to be a tendency to respond to this contact more readily when the parents are seen as genuinely wanting to help their child.

4) The level of information provided both to parents and children also appears crucial. The ability to make choices about the help offered to the child is a crucial element in feeling involved. However, the exploration has also suggested that the context in which such information is presented is key as to whether that information is assimilated by the parent or child.

5) Parents and children need to perceive they have a defined role within the relationship and the help offered to the child. This again appears to have a significant impact on the feeling of genuine value that each feels. Failure to define this role leads to the parent or child attempting to define their own role. Where this conflicts with the expectations of the teacher this can enhance any feelings of mistrust that exist already.

6) The process of the IEP appears to form a nebulous part of the relationships. It appears to have two distinct roles within the relationship, depending on whether a process of open discussion has taken place. Where it has, even though the IEP is not actually discussed, then the document appears to be little more than a paper record of this discussion in the teacher's mind. However, where no genuine discussion has taken place the use of the IEP appears to enhance the perception of the teacher as the "expert diagnoser". This serves to further diminish the influence of the parent and child views on what is provided to help the child.

Chapter 6 -Reflections on the methodology chosen.

Introduction.

Before moving onto the process of comparison and contrast between this study and the existing literature, to draw out the central themes of this study, it is necessary to comment on the process of data collection and analysis itself. The purpose of this chapter is to reflect on that process and make some judgements about how fully the methodology selected fulfilled the needs of the study. It appears important to me to look at five aspects of the methodology followed:

- (a) the use of semi-structured interviews,
- (b) the "value" of the data produced by the interview process,
- (c) the analysis of the data and the development of "themes",
- (d) the use of a "critical friend", and
- (e) the possible limitations of the use of a single site.

(a) the use of semi-structured interviews.

The choice of interviews that were semi-structured was made for two different reasons. Firstly, to produce a context in which the interviewee would feel comfortable to talk openly. Secondly, to produce depth in the data collected and to allow for issues to surface which a more formal, controlled approach might tend to restrict.

(i) the context of the interview.

Whether the interviewee felt comfortable to talk openly appears to have depended on three specific aspects of the interview - the place, the opportunity for thinking about the issues to be discussed before the interview, and whether the situation was one that the interviewee was used to.

The issue about place was that of the required level of privacy, and the feeling that what was said would not be overheard by others. This does not mean that the interviewees wanted to talk behind closed doors. Indeed, in one case, this was the opposite of what was wanted.

Parent D. was a mother from a strict Muslim background. For her reputation and peace of mind it was crucial that the location allowed her to be viewed from public vantage points (*e.g.* the school hall) and that she felt the venue was public enough but without others being able to overhear what was said. She expressed the need for her comments not to get back to her mother-in-law in case they felt she was being critical of the school behind their back, as well as to be seen in a "safe" context with a male interviewer.

What was important then was not whether others could see, but whether the interviewee felt that someone else might be listening at that moment. This effect was most marked in the pupil interviews. Whereas the parents and staff were mainly interviewed at the end of the day the children had to be interviewed whenever I could arrange a little non-contact time during the school day. The result was that often the interviews took place in rooms which, although private in the sense of being in a separate room, were not private in that the child could hear other children's, and often teacher's, voices. Until they were drawn into the interview the result of this was generally monosyllabic answers. It was only towards the middle of the interview, when the child was very focused, that the depth of data tended to dramatically improve. Indeed the most detailed child interview (Eddy) took place on the one day when I had access to a room which was away from the classrooms. In the other cases this was not possible, given the demand for space within the school.

Interestingly, interruptions to the interview had little effect. All of the staff interviews, for example, were interrupted, in some cases several times. However, these interruptions were unexpected and, as such, the expectation of being overheard was not present until the door to the room was actually opened. It would appear, then, that it was the thought of being overheard which was important, not whether someone actually entered the room unexpectedly.

A second important aspect was the use of "advanced warning" about what was likely to be discussed. This showed itself in two, markedly different, ways. Firstly, that nearly all the parents and all the staff had prepared in some way for the interview. When asked, after the

interview, there was a general feeling that the preparation had given the opportunity to give some order to the answers given. Consequently, many of the answers given demonstrated a great deal of thought and organisation, with the interviewee sure of what they were trying to convey.

Sometimes however, an issue arose which surprised the interviewee. A dramatic example of this was the interview with Parent F. While talking about the strengths of her daughter or the contact that she had with the school Parent F. was fluent and spoke in depth about why she thought what she did. However, this evaporated when we began to discuss the difficulties Fiona was experiencing at school. Parent F. wasn't aware that Fiona had any difficulties and later commented that she simply hadn't thought about this aspect despite being "warned" about it. My focus during part of the interview on her daughter's difficulties came as a surprise to her (*"...does she find something difficult at school ? "*). The conversation became one sided with me asking quite leading questions and the answers were brief. When the conversation turned to how the school communicated with her about Fiona the conversation was again dominated by Parent F.

This can be compared with the response of the children interviewed. Partly because of the unlikelihood of a young child preparing for an interview without support and partly because this group of interviews had to be more fitted in rather than planned for some time in advance the level of response was different. Responses tended to be less organised and briefer, with more detailed answers often having a long pause in the conversation before an answer was given. It was not that even the youngest child in the sample (Adam, aged 6) could not give a considered, in-depth response (for, example he could explain in painful depth about why he felt he found reading difficult at school). Rather that it was the ability, and opportunity, to prepare that made this process much easier.

A third aspect was whether the interviewee was used to an interview type of situation. While great effort was taken to ensure the tone of the interview was like an extended, but informal, conversation there is a dramatic difference in the pattern of the interviews between the child, parent and school staff. In the case of the child or parent the interviews followed a similar pattern. They began with very staccato responses despite the questions being deliberately

general and factual. As they relaxed and became involved in the conversation the responses became more fluent and longer. The pattern of the staff responses was much more even.

The body language was also different. With the children and parents, the body posture was very closed to begin with but became more open as the interview progressed. The staff's body language was much more even and generally confident.

This is not surprising, in that school staff are generally more used to the "meeting" context. It is the context in which they operate each day and one in which they are expected to take a lead. Indeed, it was noticeable that the more experienced staff were the most even in the pattern of their responses, while the support staff tended to follow the pattern of response of the parent, if in a reduced way. This would seem to suggest that for the child, or parent, the use of an informal style of interview of the type used here is crucial if the depth of data required is to be achieved. Use of a more formal structure probably would have resulted in a more hesitant response and less willingness to share perceptions in any depth.

(ii) the depth and complexity of the data collected.

The aim of using a small sample for the study was to attempt to peel away the veneer of "what" the interviewees felt and understood, to reveal the "why" of their own perspectives. This requires the methodology to produce depth in the data - both in terms of the quality and complexity of these perspectives. That this resulted can be seen can be seen by briefly looking at some short passages from the interviews themselves. The quotations chosen are not isolated incidents but, rather, are indicative of the type of data collected from the majority of the interviews.

Firstly, let us look at a quotation from one of the parent's interviews,

H - Um....In my day the way that I was taught it it was literally...it was there.....
it was no imagination or whatever and now it's more imagination and using
your own initiative which he doesn't.....he finds that hard.....

T - Right.

H - So like if it's basically put down and it's said this is how you have got to do it he gets it...

T - Right....yes...

H - If you say try and work it out for yourself he will sit there and think that he can't do it so he doesn't.....he finds that hard so that's why I said that.

Parent H. explaining why she feels that the teaching style of some teachers has provided a barrier to her child learning successfully -Appendix 1, page 4.

Secondly, a quotation from one of the children's interviews.

T- do you think your mum knows what you do in school ?

E- Yeah ! my mum says that she is magic and she is ! She knows everything I do .

T- (taken aback) Um what happens if you get in trouble once in the day ? So you don't get sent home. Does your mum still know how you behave ?

E- Yeah because as I said she is magic. She knows everything everything that I do at school

Eddy explaining how the school communicates with his parents about his behaviour !

Thirdly, a quotation from one of the staff interviews,

T- So how do you choose between targets that you have in the class and targets that you put on the IEP ?

6- Right ! On the IEP, the ones that were put on the IEP are the ones that have been, because of my own inadequacy, they have been identified by speech and language support, that they feel might help him towards this point where he can make more generalised use of things that he has learnt and be able to start applying. So things that Alison said, well this might help him to do that, that might help him to do that, those are things that I have put on his IEP. The things that I have talked about, like his writing for example, they're I don't know whether they are in parallel or where ...one of the difficulties I have had with his IEP is that in a

school context, as I said he does them very quickly and it doesn't seem to get me to the point where he can apply it, right ? So I've got other things which I hope will just help him to function on a day to day basis in class and those things haven't been put on his IEP. They are just more, I don't know what they are, mundane - they're the things that I try to do so we are almost operating at two levels. the ones that are on his IEP are to get him to the point where he can do the ones that I am trying to get him to do. Does that make sense ?

Teacher 6 explaining how he decides on the targets to include on John's IEP and why.

All three of these quotations are moving beyond "what" the interviewees think and beginning to explain their perspective on the context. That the first two are perspectives that I would not immediately thought of as an explanation for that context is perhaps vindication of the choice of methodology in itself. Even the third quotation is at a level of explanation that a more closed question would probably have missed. Consequently, while the use of semi-structured interviews did achieve depth I feel that the approach was even more successful in allowing the unexpected in arising. People's perspectives cannot always be anticipated (especially Eddy's !) and this type of interview provides the room for these to emerge to challenge the researcher's presumptions . Incidentally Eddy continued to hold this perspective on his mother's involvement over several further, if brief, conversations until he left the school some months later.

(iii) some possible drawbacks of this style of interviewing.

While this approach appears to have been largely appropriate it is also important to note that there are some possible drawbacks with an interview style such as this. Within this study three issues arose which might be considered drawbacks of such an approach. Firstly, there was the issue of the time that each interview took. Often the interviewee had only a limited amount of time that they could give for the interview. This was particularly so for the parents, where the interviews largely took place at the end of the school day and parents either had children to collect or children to supervise if the interviews were held in their own home. Using a relatively unstructured approach means that you are dependant to a large extent on the interest and desire of the interviewee to discuss the areas that you, the interviewer, raise

as areas for discussion. This can cause a sense of tension between the desire to cover the areas that you the interviewer may wish to cover and the areas that the interviewee wishes to explore or dwell upon. Given the limited amount of time a certain amount of compromise in the breadth of the interview has to be accepted.

Secondly, another possible drawback is the issue of an interviewee who comes to the interview with an agenda which is perhaps not conducive to discussing the areas that you wish to explore. The risk here is that with the control of the interview largely being devolved to the interviewee their own agenda may dominate to such an extent that the purpose of the interview becomes lost. This may be particularly so where time is limited. This issue arose in at least three of the interviews. The child Eddy wished to impress on me that he was well behaved, Parent D. wished to impress on me that she was a "good" mother, and Parent J. wanted help to define what her son's difficulty was and provide a label by which she could define it. In each case finding a balance between allowing the interviewee to lead the conversation and guiding them to discuss the areas that you wished to cover required careful tact and a willingness to accept that not all the areas would be covered within the interview. In some cases they had to be covered in a more informal form later.

A third issue that arose was that of how much information to provide the interviewee with as a result of the areas that they chose to discuss in greater detail. This was particularly so in the case of the parents, with the example of Parent F. not being aware that her daughter was experiencing difficulties at school (discussed above) being a typical request for information about their own child. This is particularly an issue for the insider-researcher, where they will often have knowledge and access to information that an outsider would not. A balance needed to be found which provided the parent with at least the ability to gain access to such information at a later date, if they wished to pursue the issue, whilst not undermining the position of fellow colleagues within the school. Requests for information about the process aspects of special needs (such as what the different stages mean) are far easier to deal with. Finding this balance was possible by explaining how to find out the information they desired but might cause great problems if such requests had not been anticipated and an approach not thought about beforehand.

(b) the "value" of the data collected.

In trying to assess the "value" of data collected, it is important to ask a simple, but searching, question. Were the answers given honestly given, or were they given because the interviewees felt they were the answers that the interviewer wanted to hear ? This issue is most generally termed "reactivity". In the case of a practitioner researcher some reactivity is inevitable, given the existing relationships they already have with the interviewees. What is important is to make an assessment of the extent of the reactivity and to judge whether the effect has unduly distorted the data collected.

Reactivity can be seen to varying extents in all the groups of interviewees. It appears more prevalently in the case of the parents and children. For example, in the case of the parents two examples typical of the interviews are:

T - Do you feel the school tells you enough about how Devi's doing at school ?

D - Well then again I don't think they do tell you enough. I don't want to be rude or anything...

T - No, no.... I'm... nothing of this is going to go back to school.....

D -and, um, I can't say they tell you everything but it's a matter of us...we're the parents....like me I always ask... I have to ask... oh you know, how did she do today...

Parent D., Appendix 2, page 67.

T - Has the school told you what John is good at and what he finds more difficult ?

J - Well so far Mr K. is working on that....because he has just gone into Mr K.'s class....

T - Yes.

J - ...but I had a chat with you before Mr. James and you told me what he finds.....

when John was in your class he did find a lot of things easy...he was doing ever

so well...I think it is yours and Mr L.'s class so far that he has done the best in.....

and I don't know why...maybe because you are men and he's always around women,

I don't know.... but he seemed to find it very, very easy...dropping in and talking to you taught me that.

Parent J.

Further evidence can be seen in the pupil interviews. For example,

T- If you were finding something really difficult at school um..... would you tell

Ms. P. that you were finding it difficult ?

F- Yes.

T- Right and would you tell your mum ?

F- Yes (*but not nearly so sure a yes*).

T- You don't mind her knowing about how you are doing at school and things

F- Yes.

T- You do (*we both laugh*). Do you like to keep it secret from her sometimes ?

F- No (*by her body language I felt here that this was meant for my consumption and the real answer was probably yes !*)

Fiona - talking about how her mother knows how she is doing at school.

T- do you get sent home often ?

E- only that one time - remember ?

T- No, I don't remember. I know that you have been sent home but I don't know how often.

Eddy - talking about how the school deals with him when he gets in trouble.

These four examples are interesting in that they show four different types of reactivity to myself. The first is an unsureness about how I will accept a negative comment as a teacher, the second a recalling of conversations when I her child's teacher, the third probably a direct lie because she was unsure how to react and the fourth an attempt to impress on me that he is normally well behaved.

However, I would argue, while they do show reactivity none of them is of sufficient magnitude to call into question the rest of the interview. In the first two cases the implicit criticism is still made despite the apology. In the case of the pupil interviews the children still went on to share their thoughts about school and the reasons why they felt they found some parts of school life difficult.

Indeed, in many of the interviews what was shared was often very personal and evoked a great deal of emotion on the part of the interviewee. Several of the parents and children actually shed tears, or were very near to it. At times there was a great deal of anger in the voices of both parents, children, and ,in one case, a teacher (who was very critical of how the Headteacher had dealt with the child). An example of this type of passage was when John volunteered the reason why he felt that he was experiencing difficulties learning in class,

T- OK. Let's have a look at the ones that you find difficult in class.

J- Because when I'm in the class Keron is always poking me. So I say stop it
(this was volunteered without explicit prompting)

T- Right. OK. So that is presumably why you find it difficult to concentrate ?

J- Yes.

T- Yes ? And be good, and listen and be quiet ? *(other areas he felt were "difficult")*

J- Yes. Sometimes Keron pokes someone in the back or somebody else and everyone thinks that it is me but I'm watching the teacher

T- And you end up getting into trouble. *(J. nods - facial expression is sad, body slumps visibly)*. Do you think that Mr. K. knows that it is Keron?

J- Sometimes he says that.

T- Do you tell Mr. K. ? *(nods)*. And does Mr. K. sort it out ? *(shakes head in negative slowly. No longer making eye contact)* What would you like him to do ?

J- Sort it out.

T- How would you like him to sort it out ?

J- Um tell them to stop it.

T- And do you think that they would stop it ?

J- They'd carry it on.

T- Right. ...

J- (*makes eye contact again, shakes head and tears well up in his eyes - starts to cry*).

T- It's OK (*I put my hand on his shoulder briefly*).

Further, in some of the interviews, that I was a member of staff at the school appears to have been helpful in that it gave the interviewee a shared context in which to root their comments. At one stage in the interview with Parent J she put forward the idea that her son might achieve more in a class with a male teacher. To explain this idea she used the example of myself teaching John and recalled comments that I had made about how well John was doing. While I had never suggested my gender was a factor in her son's progress the meeting did provide a comfortable example for her to develop her ideas within. However, I would not want to extend this argument too far with its attendant danger that simply because we share a context I can presume that I understood what the interviewee meant.

(c) analysis of the data and the development of themes.

I have already discussed the depth and complexity of the data produced in a previous part of this chapter. However, it is worth reflecting for a moment on the way in which I approached the analysis of the data. Were there advantages in approaching each interview afresh, or, in hindsight, would a form of coding have been more helpful in the analysis of the data? It should be remembered that the reason for selecting this relatively unstructured approach was that it would allow for previously unexpected issues to arise from the data.

One of the groups of participants to the relationships that are the focus of this study that I interviewed were the classroom assistants that support the children individually. Originally this was to fill out the background of the, what I saw as more central relationship, of the teacher and pupil relationship. These interviews were interesting, but it was only when I began to analyse them that their significance became more obvious. This revealed that one of the central ways in which the child has a voice in the support they receive in the study school is through the classroom assistant acting as an intermediary for that child. This was not an

intentional strategy but, rather, a way in which each of the classroom assistants had devised to give the child some choice and control over their learning. This is not a theme which I would, necessarily, have picked up if I had used a formal coding system to analyse the data. However, it has provided an interesting insight into how to provide the child with a greater voice in the support that they receive.

There were other examples of unexpected themes arising within the data collected as well. These include the parents' general lack of even basic knowledge of what is taught at the school and how it is taught. Also, the relative lack of a close working relationship between the classroom teacher and the classroom assistants their children work with and the reasons for this. These issues underpin the context in which the relationship happen, but are possibly not ones that would have arisen if a more static form of analysis had been used on the data.

However, one note of caution does need to be raised here. This arises from the style of interview used within the study. Because the interview style allowed the interviewee to have a great deal of control over the direction of the interview it is possible that the areas that each interview covered could be quite disparate. Whilst, in reality, the interviews did largely cover the same areas it is possible that analysis could prove to be very difficult because there is insufficient areas of overlap to allow the process of comparison and contrast to take place.

(d) the use of a "critical friend" and isolated reflection.

The purpose of involving a "critical friend" was two-fold. Firstly, there was the need to allow someone to scrutinise the process of the research and the inferences made from the data collected. A second reason, equally important and potentially more valuable, was that involving another in the process of developing the themes that derived from the data would provide a rich source of new ideas and perspectives to view the data from.

However, while I feel that much of the methodology chosen worked well I do feel that this was the least successful strand of the methodology selected. The reasons for this derive from the context in which the study was set up. Because the study was based in one small school the need to maintain confidentiality was always likely to be a major issue. It would not be

difficult to connect a child with their teacher in such a close-knit community. For this reason, it seemed unfair to me to select a "friend" who worked at the school. However, using a "friend" who is not part of that context has the drawback that they have little knowledge of that context.

As a result of this "dilemma" while the first purpose was met, the second was partially unfulfilled. The scrutinising of the procedures and inferences drawn was carried out was done in two ways. The first was that the "friend" observed, by way of acting as a translator, one of the interviews. This formed the basis of a very helpful and challenging discussion about how I guided the interview and whether I tended to ask questions which were leading ones, rather than more exploratory in nature. The second was for us to discuss several of the transcripts from interviews. These discussions focused on whether the inferences I drew from each were genuinely within the text of the transcript, or whether other inferences were possible. In a sense, then, this went some way toward providing alternative possible perspectives on the data produced.

However, I had arranged to discuss the inferences drawn at a more general level with a teacher within the school. This I felt would protect confidentiality, because of the general nature of the issues discussed, but provide a challenge to my perspective from a fellow "insider" who would have a detailed knowledge of the context. Unfortunately, half-way through the data collection process this person successfully applied for a new post and left the school. Given that the post was a Headship this has rightly commanded all his attention, and left little time to discuss the study.

Consequently, much of the reflection on the conclusions drawn, given the context, had to happen in isolation. While this is eminently possible it is perhaps not an ideal way to ensure that the practitioner researcher keeps that crucial distance to stop new and challenging issues from being filtered out by their own presumptions of the context.

(e) the possible limitations of the use of a single site.

Using a single site to base a study on was a two-edged sword. It provided the opportunity to gain access to a rich source of data. However, it also possibly limits the ability to suggest how applicable the findings of the study might be to other schools and contexts. In one sense this does not matter, in that much qualitative research openly embraces this limitation. Most often, as here, a "thick description" of the site is provided and the reader is left to consider how applicable the findings of the study might be to their own context.

However, each school is unique and within this study two aspects need to be given careful consideration in this process of comparison. Firstly, the school is possibly unusual in that nearly all the teaching staff may be considered to be "experienced" teachers. As such all but one received their initial training many years ago, and certainly before the concepts of inclusion became part of mainstream educational thinking. Further, as "experienced" teachers there may be a greater tendency to rely on pragmatic experience at the expense of adapting their practice in the light of new research into children's learning. With the constant demands on teachers to react to Government, or Local Authority, initiatives there is understandably often little time to reflect on issues such as their philosophy of learning.

Secondly, each school responds in its own unique way to the needs of its pupils. In the case of children considered to be experiencing special needs while the Code of Practice provides a lead, how this is practically implemented is left to the school itself, under the guidance of the Local Education Authority that it sits within. It may be that the approach taken by the school studied is idiosyncratic in the extent that it separates mainstream and special aspects of the child's curriculum. The format of the IEP might also be seen to be unique to that school. However, it should also be noted that each school within the Education Authority that it sits within received the same initial training and the same demands in the type of documentation, and use of that documentation, are made on all schools within that Authority.

What I am suggesting here is when considering a single site study comparison of "thick descriptions" needs to be carefully made, with particular attention given to the more idiosyncratic details of that description. I am not suggesting that the school within which the

study took place is so unique that comparison cannot be made (this would reduce qualitative research to the level of anecdote) but rather that these small details can have an important influence on how the findings of the study are applied to other contexts.

Chapter 7 - Conclusions.

Introduction

Having considered the existing literature and analysed the data provided from the study it is now time to draw these two strands together to provide some tentative answers to the research questions which form the core of this study. This is what this final chapter seeks to do.

However, this is not enough. The study was born out of a practical need. This was to provide the school I work within with a practical way to develop and enhance its approach to meeting the needs of children considered to have special needs. The literature reviewed clearly shows that this is most effectively achieved within the context of a relationship where all the participants are genuinely involved. Consequently, this final chapter also seeks to provide a practical way forward. It does this by distilling the overall findings of the study down further still to a number of key factors which could be used to enhance the ways in which the school develops these relationships to help the child overcome their additional needs more effectively. To begin with, then, it is necessary to turn to providing answers to each of the research questions.

What is the nature of the relationship between the teacher and the parents of children defined as having "special educational needs" ?

In considering the nature of this relationship several interesting issues are raised if the findings of the research study are compared with the existing literature:

1) The depth of difference in perspectives.

One of the most interesting, and striking, aspects of comparing the literature reviewed with the data provided by this study is the depth of difference that appears to exist between the perspectives of the teachers and parents. That there may be differences in perspective is often acknowledged within the literature but this study suggests that the depth of the differences

may have been underestimated. This appears to be so in two distinct areas. Firstly, the perspectives that each holds about the other and particularly the beliefs that each holds concerning the root causes of the difficulties that the child is facing. Secondly, on the type of relationship that actually exists between the teacher and parent.

In the case of teacher perspectives both the study (chapter 4, page 89) and the literature reviewed (Braun, 1992, and Armstrong, 1995) suggest that while at a surface level the teacher may state that the parent is the prime educator of the child, underneath this lies the belief that where the child has a difficulty the home context, and by implication the parent, are often part of the root cause of these difficulties. In other words, the initial underlying perspective of the teacher is often to "blame" the parent.

Where there were differences between the literature reviewed and this study these lay in where exceptions were made to this perspective. In the literature reviewed these tended to focus on the issues of "shared values" between the teacher and parent, in terms of how best to bring up a child, and on the distinction between learning and behavioural difficulties (Vincent, 1996, Holden *et al*, 1986, and Sandow, 1994). The study suggests that while the concept of "shared values" may be prevalent a more pressing distinction may be rather between those difficulties which the parent is perceived to have some influence over and those which they do not. Typically these were medically defined needs (chapter 4, page 90). There is also evidence that this sense of blame may also be mitigated where the teacher feels that the reasons for the parental failing are the result of issues such as a lack of experiences of the world due to relative poverty (chapter 4, page 89).

In terms of the parental perspectives there was ample evidence within the study to support the arguments found within the literature that the underlying perspective of the parent is to look on the teacher as an expert and, as such, look to them for a solution to the difficulties their child is facing (for example, Armstrong, 1995 and chapter 4, page 69). Many of the literature sources reviewed suggest that the parents hold this perspective because they feel that they have "failed" their children, lack the knowledge to change things and perceive the teacher as someone who will act in a fair way toward their child and themselves (Braun, 1992, and Seligman and Darling, 1997).

This study suggests slightly different influences at work. In contrast, within the study, many of the parents had highly coherent beliefs about the causes of their child's difficulties and located the reasons for the difficulties their children were facing within the teaching style of the teacher themselves (chapter 4, pages 87-9). They did recognise, in almost all cases, that they lacked knowledge both of what their child was learning and the process whereby to get their views heard (for example, see chapter 4, page 99). However, there was an overwhelming belief and desire that they should have this knowledge (chapter 4, page 70).

The data provided by the study also suggests that a further important consideration is the breadth of the context in which such needs are perceived by the parent and teacher. This is touched briefly upon by the model of parent and teacher perspectives provided by Atkin *et al.* (1988) - what he refers to as their "philosophy of education" (see also Armstrong and Galloway, 1992). While the parent tends to view their child as a whole and view what happens at school as part of this whole, the teacher appears to have a different focus to their view of the child. The teacher is primarily concerned with learning and, as such, elements that occur outside of the immediate learning environment of the child (the classroom) will tend to be considered in the light of the impact that they are perceived to have on that learning (for examples of this in the study see chapter 4, pages 72, 76, 83-5).

The suggestion here is that while the parent may see themselves as a naturally important part of the environment of the child, and hence naturally involved, the teacher will tend to view this involvement in light of the impact that they feel it has on the child's learning. As such the parent may presume involvement but the teacher may only seek to involve the parent where they believe that this will have a beneficial impact on the child's learning. In the case of a teacher "blaming" the parent such impact will most likely be minimal, at best. Hence, the motivation to involve the parents may be low in the list of priorities in an already busy day.

Wide differences also appear to exist in the perspectives that the teacher and parent hold of the quality of relationship that exists between them. The literature reviewed argues that the professional often overestimates the level of involvement and understanding of the parent within the relationship. They feel that they explain issues carefully in appropriate language and by acceptance of their views by the parent, that the parent is satisfied with the type of relationship that exists (Armstrong, 1995, Beveridge, 1997, and Houlton, 1986).

Within this study there was also a strong belief amongst the teachers that they had shared a great deal of information with the parent (chapter 4, page 78). However, this was not felt to be so by the parents themselves, and a real lack of basic knowledge was evident during all the parental interviews conducted (see chapter 4, page 76-7). The suggestion of the study is that this difference is accounted for by three considerations.

Firstly, that most of the meetings are of a semi-public nature and, as such, several parents were uncomfortable discussing what they often perceive as their child's "failings" (chapter 4, page 92). Secondly, that such information is presented to parents within the context of meetings designed to discuss the child's progress more generally. A balanced opinion of both strengths and weaknesses is presented. Because of this mixed message, and the parents' not unnatural desire to focus on what they feel shows themselves and their child off to their best advantage, the information about the child's needs, and how they are to be met, tends to be lost in this more generalised discussion (chapter 4, page 79). Thirdly, there is a strong belief amongst the teachers that unless the parent specifically says otherwise, the parent is happy with the existing relationship and the way in which it is operating (chapter 4, page 86). This includes a presumption that they have understood what they have been told. That this is not so was also evident within the study (chapter 4, page 81).

If the differences in perspective are as wide as the study suggests it is pertinent to ask why such differences did not lead to greater conflict or disagreement within the groupings of the study. Only one of the groupings (Belinda's) provided substantial evidence of conflict and breakdown, although Henry's had in the past (Parent H. indicated this when reflecting on a previous teacher's approach to Henry - discussed before).

For two of the parents (Parents F. and C.) the answer was simple - they did not know that the school thought that their child was experiencing difficulties at school. For the others the answer appears to lie in the fact that while the relationships were causing some irritation to the parents it was only in the Belinda grouping that the way in which the teacher was working with the child seemed to the parent not to be providing an adequate solution. For the other parents within the groupings while they were often irritated at the way in which they had to constantly initiate contact to gain information, or accept the semi-public nature of parents'

evenings, they did not feel the need to allow their irritation to become public while they felt their child's needs were being met. It appears that while the help given to the child was perceived to be appropriate, or working, the parent was prepared to be irritated (chapter 4, page 138).

It was only where the help was felt to be "failing" that irritation developed into outright conflict. Even at this level of breakdown the result was one of suspicion and mistrust in the other, rather than the underlying beliefs about the causes of the difficulties the child was facing becoming transparent. As such the question of the causes of the difficulty were never explored in any depth. Both the teacher and parent could maintain their perspective without challenge from the other (chapter 4, page 141). As Braun (1992) argues, it is only when something goes wrong that conflict arises and positions tend to become clearly stated. In effect, then, the depth of the differences in perspective remained hidden and the myth of "everyone wanting the best for the child" (meaning they had similar perspectives and goals) could be maintained.

2) The process aspects of the relationship.

Further interesting issues arise when considering the process aspects of the relationship. Within the literature there is a focus on the professional dominance of the relationship through control of the agenda, access to information and familiarity of the context that meetings take place within (typically the school). This is enhanced, it is argued, by the way in which the professional interacts. Often information that is given is lost by the parental focus on the more personal comments made about the child (Mallett, 1997, and Armstrong, 1995). This is only enhanced by the belief that if decisions were to be jointly made parents would lack the basis upon which to make decisions which were in the best interests of the child. Consequently the level of information is only given at the level of what the professional believes the parent will understand or be interested in (Knill and Humphries, 1996). Further, little advance warning of the issues to be discussed is given and much that is discussed is often unexpected. The result is often silence, or passive acceptance.

Much of this analysis is also supported within this study (for example, see chapter 4, pages 76, 80). There is much evidence that where the parent is seen as part of the "problem" there

was little desire to do more than inform the parent of the need and explain the sort of support that the school would like. There was effectively a filtering of information to what the teacher felt was important or worth explaining. This left the parents without the necessary depth of information to make an informed decision about the solutions that were presented to them. This was only added to by the semi-public nature of contact (either at the classroom doorway or at parents' evenings) and the need for the parent to initiate contact at other times than parents' evenings or review meetings. It is difficult to ask effective questions in these contexts or to ask a searching question when there is a lack of knowledge about the range of possibilities that exist. When presented by a single solution by a teacher your options are effectively reduced to acceptance or rejection, rather than being able to offer viable alternative solutions that can be freely discussed.

However, the study also suggests that another element of this approach is the pressures of workload and time that teachers feel themselves to be under (chapter 4, page 85, see also Hancock, 1998). In a context where parental involvement is not perceived to be capable of making a major impact on the learning of the child it is simply not perceived to be a priority amongst all the other priorities pressing in on the teacher's day. This is wedded to the belief that the decision making process concerning children's learning requires specialist skills and knowledge, and that this is the role of the teacher as an "expert".

Consequently, while the nature of the relationship appears to be dominated by the underlying, *widely differing perspectives that the parent and teacher bring to the relationship the process elements of the relationship appear to enhance the dominance of the teacher.* They serve to put the teacher into a position in which their solution is much more likely to be passively accepted. This further allows the teacher to proceed with their own agenda without their underlying perspectives needing to become transparent and open to questioning.

3) What level of involvement do the parents want ?

A final consideration of the nature of this relationship is one that is only briefly addressed within the existing literature. That is, what level of involvement is actually desired by the parent ? Often it is assumed that involvement means involvement in every aspect of the decision making process - from the underlying diagnosis, to the priority setting for

programmes of support for the child, to the details of that support programme, and assessment of progress made.

This study suggests that this all encompassing view may not be accurate. It would appear that primarily the parents would like to be involved in the second and fourth aspects of this process, with a level of information to allow them to make an informed decision from a variety of options. Such additional help is viewed as happening both in school and at home. The other two aspects were seen as part of the role of the teacher as an expert (chapter 4, page 70 - 1).

However, these conclusions should be considered very tentative. Within the study no parent had been offered a role within the diagnosis process (although one did discuss such a diagnosis with the teacher). As such it may simply be that such a role is outside the conceptions of the parent. Secondly, it should be noted that while the needs of the child were often explicitly described by the teacher, or even the parent, the underlying diagnosis of the roots of the need rarely were. As such the contrast in such beliefs rarely emerged and the locating of a large part of the causes for the difficulties faced by the child in the other remained hidden behind the more practical aspects of how to meet these needs.

What is the nature of the relationship between the teacher and the child defined as having special educational needs ?

In considering the nature of this relationship some interesting insights are provided when the research findings of the study are compared with the literature reviewed. In some ways the differences that emerge are a reflection of the literature's focus on the role of the outside professional while the study's focus is on the interaction between the pupil and their teacher. However, two important issues can be drawn out:

1) The level of involvement of the child.

As with the professional and parent relationship, at the heart of this relationship appear to be the underlying perspectives of the teacher themselves. They have the decision making role of

whether to attempt to genuinely involve the child. The existing literature suggests that this decision is made primarily on the basis of the professional's perception of themselves as an expert and whether taking into account the views of the child is in fact in the best interests of the child. Hence, while there may be a desire to involve in theory, this may not occur in reality because the professional does not see the contribution made as likely to benefit the child in the key area of enhancing the child's learning (Ingram and Worrall, 1993, Armstrong and Galloway, 1992, and Armstrong, 1995). This tendency, it is argued, is only emphasised by the competing pressures on the time of the professional (Hancock, 1998).

This study would support much of these views. However, it also suggests some of the reasons why they may be held in the small primary school context. The root of the lack of involvement of the pupil within the study appears to lie in three distinctive reasons:

- (i) that the teachers view their role as essentially a directive one based on an increasingly fixed curriculum focused on the "norm" (chapter 4, page 91),
- (ii) that the views of children at the primary age are inherently unstable and focus on the concept of what they like in the here and now rather than a longer term view of things that are found difficult (chapter 4, page 110, but also Gersch, 1996), and
- (iii) that experience of asking for pupil views have shown that they will tend to have little in the way of a relevant contribution to make (chapter 4, page 110-1).

The result of these views in the school studied tended to be that the additional needs of the child perceived to be experiencing difficulties were seen as being best met outside of the mainstream teaching of the rest of the class. This additional element was seen as the arena of the "expert". This, combined with the perception of the limited value of attempting to involve the child and the time pressures felt by teachers, overrode the much more limited desire to genuinely involve the child. As such attempts to meet these needs tended to be 'done to them' rather than 'done with them'. However, this should not be seen as necessarily simply ignoring the child, but rather as a pragmatic outworking of the perspectives of the teacher concerning the abilities of the child combined with the context that they work within (chapter 4, page 110).

(2) The child's response to attempts to involve them.

The area of the involvement of the child themselves also raises some interesting issues. Much of the literature reviewed relates to children either at the top end of the primary school or those in the secondary age range. The study's focus was on the broad range of primary school children (from Year 1 to Year 6).

What was interesting about the children interviewed within the study was the coherence and detailed nature of the perspectives that they held of themselves and the difficulties that they were facing. All of the children had an opinion about what they found difficult and, perhaps more importantly, why they believed they found those aspects problematic. In most cases the children also made a clear distinction between what they did not like and what they found difficult. As with the existing literature (Tisdall and Dawson, 1994), many of the children expressed a desire to be able to share their views and valued the opportunity to explain these to someone. This became stronger the older the child was (chapter 4, page 108).

However, it is also clear from this study that these views were not being heard. The literature reviewed suggests several reasons for this. Firstly, low self-esteem on the part of the child (Galloway and Leo, 1995). Secondly, a process and information sharing which passes over the head of the child (Roller, 1998). Thirdly, a desire on the part of the professional to act in the best interests of the child, which often leads the professional to reject the views of the child in favour of their own view (for example, see Braun, 1992). This leads to the child responding to attempts to involve in a passive way and to the development of survival strategies (Ingram and Worrall, 1993).

The evidence from this study would support many of these views. There was evidence of clear development of such strategies (for example, chapter 4, page 116) and the teachers interviewed often reported a passive response from the children when asked about their needs (chapter 4, page 110, 138). However, the study suggests the reasons for this within a primary school of this type may have a different focus than those outlined in the literature. These appear to be fourfold:

Firstly, while the children generally had coherent opinions and would have welcomed the opportunity to express them, they lacked the skills and confidence to express them when asked. This was partly due to a lack of experience in responding to such questions but even more due to a lack of skill in organising their views and expressing them in an organised form. In some cases this was further enhanced by a struggle to be able to express themselves in a language that they could use in a simple form but felt less confident to use to express more complex ideas (chapter 4, page 118).

Secondly, such consultation tended to happen on an *ad hoc* basis. This meant that the child usually had no warning that their views would be sought and little opportunity to give more than an instant reaction. They had no time to prepare their views in a coherent form, nor time to prepare to present them. This difficulty was further enhanced by the fact that they were being asked to present them to a person who they are generally expected to obey and accept instructions from - namely, their teacher.

Thirdly, the children had almost no information on which to organise their views around. There was almost no evidence within the study that the children had had the process of why their views were being solicited explained to them. Nor had they had the range of ways in which their needs could be met explained to them in a form which allowed them the possibility of making a genuine choice between those different ways.

Fourthly, there was a belief amongst many of the children that their parents would have shared their views with the teacher. As such, the teacher would be aware of their view of their needs and difficulties, and would take them into account, without the child needing to express them themselves (chapter 4, page 138).

This difference in focus has important implications if the child is to be genuinely involved. It suggests that while the process of the meeting may be important, what is crucial is that the child is helped to develop the skills needed to organise and communicate their views. These then need to be combined with sufficient process information as well as information about the range of options that could be chosen to meet their needs. They then need to be given the time and supportive environment to use these skills and information effectively.

It also suggests that the teacher themselves may not be best placed to elicit the genuine views of the child. The role of the teacher is essentially a directive one, with compliance expected on the part of the child. As such genuine two-way discussion is unlikely to happen spontaneously (Ingram and Worrall, 1993). It is perhaps not surprising, then, that within the study that the one case where the child had been able to express contrary views to that of the teacher in a constructive, coherent form this had been facilitated by the classroom assistant that he worked with on a daily basis (chapter 4, page 117).

What effect does having a written IEP have on these relationships ?

In many ways the findings of this study appear to confirm many of the criticisms made of the IEP and the process whereby they are designed and implemented. There was little evidence that the IEP process helped the child to become included within the class curriculum by using the planning process to impact on, and modify, that curriculum . Nor did the process appear to act as a catalyst for the greater involvement of the parents or the children themselves.

Essentially this was because of the way in which the teachers perceived the classroom curriculum. This curriculum was seen as largely fixed and the ability to modify it any more than peripherally perceived as outside the control of the teacher. Where children did not benefit from this single, if differentiated, approach it was felt that their needs fell outside the classroom curriculum and an additional element was needed to help them. In effect such meeting of needs was perceived as a "bolt on" addition to the everyday curriculum of the child that all the class received (Goddard, 1997, Ainscow, 1997, Tod, 1999, chapter 4, page 121-3).

This was only emphasised by the approach taken to the design of the Individual Education Plan within the school studied. Because of the demand that the targets set were measurable against the progress of that specific child those targets tended to be set separately from those of the rest of the class (Hart, 1998, Ainscow, 1997, chapter 4, page 124-7). Consequently the IEP tended to focus on separate, or additional, approaches to meeting these needs. This was further enhanced in the school studied, as Ainscow (1997) argues, by the tendency to rely on

the use of support staff to implement such planning (chapter 4, page 124). Effectively, then, the narrow focus of the targets set served to lose the focus on the issue of access for the child within the wider classroom curriculum (D.f E.E., 1996).

In terms of the IEP as a tool of consultation between the professional and the parent, or child, the study serves to confirm the arguments of much of the literature. While in theory it could form the basis of effective consultation, in practice it tended to emphasise the position of the professional and distanced the parent, or child, from the decision making process (Cooper, 1996, and Hart, 1998). In the study this was because of the way in which targets were set within the IEP. This was viewed as a technical process best suited to the specialist skills of the teacher. The result was that the target setting was done by the teacher and the resulting document was a technical one which was, in practice, often inaccessible to the parent or child (Thomas, 1995, chapter 4, page 127-8). Further, because of its perceived technical nature, it was often felt to be of little interest to parents, or would serve only to panic parents if presented to them in that form (Bowers and Wilkinson, 1998, chapter 4, pages 80, 128). Consequently, the parent, or child, seldom had physical access to the IEP either or the process by which it was designed. In effect the IEP became the planning tool of the teacher rather than a document which formed the basis of consultation with a wider audience.

Within this study there was also a strong tendency to view the IEP as a single document which necessarily needed to be designed by a single approach. Largely because of the nature of the type of targets set (they were perceived to need to be SMART targets) the diagnosis and programme setting were seen as the domain of the expert. Consequently, the whole process whereby the IEP was designed tended to be seen in this light as well.

This emphasis was further enhanced by the perceived demands of the outside agencies within the LEA that the school was situated in terms of accessing additional resources and being accountable for these resources when provided. It was perceived that such documentation needed to be of a technical nature and written in "educational" language. At the heart of such required documentation is the IEP (chapter 4, page 131).

What these arguments suggest is that what is crucial is perhaps not the terminology or procedures themselves, but rather the way in which these affect the perspectives of the

teacher towards that child. They tend to locate the child, and their additional needs, outside the framework of the everyday classroom curriculum and into the realms of the specialist or expert. This appears to affect the perspectives of the teacher in two ways. Firstly, it tends to separate the additional needs of that child from the rest of the class in the mind of the teacher. The result is the perception that the child requires an additional, separate approach to meeting those needs, rather than a more carefully differentiated one within the mainstream of the class curriculum.

Secondly, because such needs require a specialist approach this emphasises the belief of the teacher as an expert. As the parent, and child, are perceived to lack this expertise their role in meeting those needs is seen as more peripheral. This tends to only emphasise the perception of the teacher as the diagnoser and planner and the parent, or child, as the supporter to be informed and advised. In effect, then, the way in which the IEP was designed, and used, within the school studied set up a way of thinking which functioned to enhance the role of the teacher and further exclude the involvement of the parent and child.

Turning theory into possible practice - some actions points to develop practice.

Having suggested these tentative answers to the research questions posed by this study, it is now important to consider how they might be used in a practical sense to enhance provision within a school of this type. As such any model must achieve three broad aims:

- (a) it must provide ways in which to genuinely involve the parent,
- (b) it must provide ways in which to genuinely involve the child, and
- (c) it must be pragmatic enough to fit comfortably within the working day of the teacher.

If even these very basic aims are not met any model of working developed will not gain the level of engagement and commitment necessary from all the participants for a development in provision to be successfully achieved. To achieve this eight key factors appear to be of crucial importance.

(1) Teacher perspectives.

Central to these factors are the perspectives that the teacher brings to the relationship. This is so in two ways. Firstly, they must view the child in a "global" sense. That is, they need to genuinely view the child's learning and needs as occurring in a broader context than the classroom environment. In this way the home context is a central part of the learning process rather than an item amongst many other peripheral items whose value is judged against the impact it has on the child's learning in the narrow context of the classroom. Only in this way will the involvement of others be valued in meeting the needs of the child.

Secondly, the teacher's concept of special needs must be one that does not view the everyday learning and the additional needs of the child as being separate from each other. The concept of "special educational needs" in itself traditionally brings with it the baggage of once the child is defined as having "needs" a specialist, and separate, approach is necessary. Rather, the concept of "differentiation" is perhaps more appropriate in that the needs of the child are seen as best met by the extension of the curriculum of the classroom. While the additional needs of the child are still being met the class learning and the additional needs are integrated. This may not always be a feasible approach to take in the case of children with, for example, specific medical or cognitive processing needs. However, I would argue, it is a feasible approach within the needs of children at the earlier, school based stages of the Code of Practice (1994) such as this study has focused on.

Within the sample school this more global and inclusive view of the child and their needs was rarely in evidence. This is not a matter of changing the process in which meeting such needs sit but rather a change in the way of thinking. Without such a refocusing it is unlikely that changes in the process will have a sustained effect. As Corbett (1996) argues, in terms of the language of special needs, new ideas tend to be interpreted in the context of the more established ones. This is likely to be so in this case. For example, unless the views of the parent and child are genuinely accorded value by the teacher then changes in process may lead to such views being sought more often, but they will still have little influence in the core decision making process. In this case the only solution may be a period of in-service training focussing on the more conceptual ideas of the value of involvement and inclusion.

This may be especially so in cases such as the sample school where the staff is predominantly made up of "experienced" teachers. Such teachers trained before such concepts became more mainstream, and there is little time in the teaching day to keep abreast of more current thinking given the constant rate of change within teaching over the past few years. This may be especially so if when the major training that accompanied the introduction of the Code of Practice (1994) focused predominantly on the process of IEP writing. As has already been noted, this was the case in the Local Authority that the sample school is situated within. In this case the type of deconstruction that Corbett (1996) argues is so necessary if new thinking is not simply to be reinterpreted in light of the more established simply did not happen. Without such a process of challenging deeply held concepts and ways of thinking it is unlikely that alterations to practice will have more than a superficial effect. In this way, materials such as the Index for Inclusion (Booth *et al*, 2000) may be of great use, in that they allow for the possibility of interpreting the way the school works within the concepts of an alternative "language for inclusion" (page 13). As such the school would not simply be building on existing "good practice" but rather be beginning the process of examining, and challenging, the underlying concepts themselves that that practice relies upon.

2) Discussion as the basis of communication.

A second key factor, which is closely related to the underlying perspectives of the teacher, is the approach that the teacher chooses to take in relation to communication with the parent. It seems clear from this study that if the parent is to believe that their views are valued then communication must be on the basis of open discussion. This implies that there is the possibility that the teacher will be prepared to alter the way in which they practically meet the child's needs as a result of such discussion. Simply informing the parent effectively serves to exclude the parent and reduces their role to one of supporter at best. Again this may require a process of training because, as Ross (1996) argues, learning to listen and involving others in putting forward their views is a difficult skill which very few naturally possess.

3) A comfortable, secure context with a sharp focus.

Clearly there is always going to be an imbalance in the power relationship between teacher and parent in that, pragmatically, it is the parent who is going to be entering into a domain in

which they are unused to and which the teacher feels comfortable within. Even if the parent has more than routine access to the school and the classrooms (for example, as a volunteer worker) there will still be a sense of the school being the domain of the teacher and the parent being a visitor to that domain (Vincent, 1996, and Hegarty, 1993)

However, two key aspects appear to be crucial if this imbalance is to be reduced. Firstly, such meetings need to take place in a context which is as comfortable for the parent to discuss such matters as openly as possible. Usually this would appear to be in the context of a private meeting. However, cultural and religious beliefs will need to be borne in mind and parents would need to be given a choice.

It is clear, though, that the use of parents' evenings or discussions at the doorway to the classroom is not a suitable way to develop effective communication. Both are too public in nature. Informal discussion in both of these contexts can be very valuable and do much to develop the ongoing, everyday relationship between the teacher and parent. However, they should not generally be taken to represent the parents' views at any more than an informal level.

Secondly, the subject matter of such meetings needs to have a sharp focus. In other words, there needs to be a move away from discussing the possible additional needs of the child within the context of the general progress of the child. The study shows that this tends to lead to a filtering out of the uncomfortable both for the teacher and the parent. Further, the crucial information sharing concerning the child's additional needs tends to get lost in the desire to gain a "balanced" picture of the child. Discussions which attempt to be genuinely involving appear to need to be carefully targeted in terms of what is to be discussed.

4) Access to quality information.

If the parent is to take a meaningful part in discussions about their child then there is clearly a need to have two types of quality information. These are information about the progress of their child within the school context, and information about the process within which any discussions will take place.

With regular contact, information about the child's progress will build up over time. This will also be aided by the development of integrated school management systems, which will make access to records of progress more easily accessible via computer systems. However, the process of providing such information (traditionally personal contact at parents' evenings) will need to be so that the teacher provides access to a broad range of information on the child's progress and not simply what the teacher feels comfortable in sharing.

Information about the process itself is probably best provided in a written form to the parent (or in another appropriate form if they are not literate). This would allow the parent time to come to understand the process at their own speed. Further, this would avoid the problem of the loss of such information found within the literature and the study when it is communicated by the teacher themselves in the context of a more general discussion.

5) Planning time.

If the parent, or child, is to take part in meetings or discussions in a meaningful way, the study clearly argues that this will tend to happen best when they are given time to think about the issues to be discussed. This also allows time to plan answers into a coherent form. The demands of responding to often complicated questions in a coherent way are simply too much to expect a meaningful response on the spot. As such, where such substantive discussion is to take place a time gap of several days should be given between arranging a meeting and such a meeting occurring. There should also be a clear indication of the broad areas that might be discussed. This does not mean that every face to face contact should be planned in this way. Clearly brief contact will happen much more spontaneously. However, contact such as meetings to review IEPs and discuss further planning would benefit from this approach.

6) A multifaceted view of the IEP.

If the IEP is to be the central communication and planning tool that it is seen as in some parts of the literature then a different approach to the IEP is needed. The tendency to view the IEP as a "global" document results in the tendency to allow the technical approach the teachers

perceived was required by the detailed planning part of the document (mainly for in-school and outside agency purposes) to spread throughout the document as a whole.

A more involving approach would appear to be to see the IEP as made up of multifaceted parts. In this way the teacher could maintain their role as expert while allowing the parent access to the key aspects such as discussion of needs and progress made, and deciding on the priority targets to be addressed. These aspects are those that effectively define how the needs that the child has are to be met. While they may rely on technical aspects such as assessment by testing, the discussion and decision making processes do not require technical expertise. Interestingly, this process was seen in the study to be one that the parents clearly understood and were prepared to accept as an appropriate division of labour.

An approach such as this would also require some change of thinking about the use of IEPs as a form of record in deciding about additional provision for the child at the level of the Local Education Authority. I would argue that there should be a separation between the IEP (which is best seen as a working document for a team approach to meeting the needs of the child) and the more formal record of what strategies have been attempted to meet those needs when referring that child to outside agencies. Using the IEP in this more formal way only encourages the use of technical language and for the teacher to take control of the document for the benefit of the child's possible later need of additional provision. It also helps to ensure a formality to the document which mitigates it also being used as a working document.

7) The skilled child.

If the child is to be meaningfully involved in the decision making process two issues need to be addressed. Firstly, the ability of the child to organise and express their views. Secondly, a sufficiently supportive context within which to express those views.

It was seen within this study that while the children had coherent views about their learning needs they also often had some difficulty expressing these views in an organised way without the supportive framework provided by the interviewer. One solution would be to explicitly skill the child to organise and express their views confidently - to develop their self-advocacy skills.

In the school studied an extensive circle time programme has recently been put in place aimed at skilling children in this way. This is a relatively long term solution in that such skills take time to develop and to begin to be used. However, such a whole school approach does have two distinct advantages to offer. Firstly, it is built into the ethos of the school that children are expected to have these skills and as such the expectation of the value of consulting with the child would tend to be raised. Secondly, such skills would be given to all. This helps with the issue of mobility on and off the early stages of the Code of Practice as well as the tendency, argued within the literature, that children considered to have special needs are often excluded from those sections of the existing curriculum which develop the use of thinking skills (within the investigative aspects of maths and science, for example [Rose *et al*, 1996]). This general skilling would then need to be combined with the opportunities within the normal school routine to practise these explanatory and decision making skills. Only in this way would the skills then become so ingrained that the child could respond both with confidence and the expectation that their views would not only be listened to but taken account of.

However, a second layer of support appears to be required by the child. This is the context in which the child is consulted. Two issues appear crucial here. Firstly, that such consultation needs to take place on a regular basis and to be an expected part of the child's routine. Secondly, this consultation process needs to be ongoing so that the child, as with the parent, has time to think and organise their opinions and wishes. Such an ongoing process would also allow the child to gradually develop their knowledge about the possible choices that they can make.

I would suggest that in a small primary school such as the one in the study the teacher may not be the most appropriate adult to undertake this process. They are often very limited in terms of time and the children have a tendency to expect to be told by the teacher rather than genuinely involved. Rather, this could be a role that the classroom assistant working alongside the child could take on as part of their role. This relationship is one that is often far less directive in nature and one where more informal discussion can take place. In this case the classroom assistant could either help the child to organise their views into a coherent form that the child themselves could present in an organised way. Alternatively, if the child

wished, they could gain the views of the child to present themselves acting in the role of an advocate for the child.

8) Time implications for the teacher.

Finally, developing a greater level of parental and child involvement takes time. If such a process is to be developed it appears that it is crucial that such a process does not add significantly to the workload of the teacher. The study clearly showed that the teacher perception of overload is a contributory factor in whether parents are genuinely involved in the process of meeting the child's needs. As such, even if the teacher perception is that such involvement is of pragmatic benefit, workload pressures will tend to cause such involvement to be pushed aside by the other competing priorities in the teacher's day.

This suggests that such involvement would need to be fitted within the working day of the teacher, or at least some nominal time is set aside to soften the impact that such a level of involvement may require. At the study school a half a day's non-contact time per term was provided for each teacher as a nominal contribution for each review cycle. I would suggest that unless schools are willing to invest resources in this way then the time implications of such involvement will always tend to mitigate against successful involvement.

A comment on the revised draft Code of Practice.

Towards the end of this study the revised draft of the new Code of Practice (DfE., 2000) was published. The draft has several interesting aspects when considered in the light of this study. It is heartening to see that the principle of child and parental involvement is stated so strongly (paras. 2.1, 3.1, 3.2) and that stress is laid upon the need to be more flexible, and provide appropriate levels of support and information, for both the parents and the child (para. 2.3, 3.4). The focus on how to involve the child (paras. 3.3, 3.4) also reflects the findings of this study and should provide a stronger basis for genuinely involving the child. It is also interesting to note the stress laid by the revised Code on the need to attempt to meet the child's needs through careful differentiation of the classroom curriculum (para. 5.5).

However, there are some aspects of the draft which raise a note of caution when considered in the light of this study. Firstly, there is still no duty on schools to involve either parents or the child in the decision making process about what the child's needs are and how to meet them. This is probably presumed but not explicitly stated (paras. 2.1, 3.4). Further, while the advantages and challenges of partnership are clearly stated no definition of partnership is provided to challenge schools as to their current practice.

Secondly, this stress on partnership appears to lose its force when the draft Code considers the new arrangements for IEPs (chapter 5 for the primary sector). This chapter appears to allow for the parents to have a role in the initial decision making process, but reduce the child's role to one of helping to set the targets for the IEP (para. 5.11). In the case of School Action Plus IEPs there is no mention of the parental role in the initial decision making process and the action is stated to be one where "schools should always consult specialists *when they take action on behalf of the child*" (para. 5.16, my italics). I would suggest that unless it is clearly stated to schools that parents and the child should be involved in the core decision making processes then there is a danger that their involvement will remain on the periphery of that process and focus mainly on the selection of targets within a discussion still dominated by the professional.

The Future - the "usefulness" of the study

While a study such as this one is a piece of research that can stand in its own right, I believe that such work should be capable of making a useful contribution on a wider level. The study was born out of the practical need of wanting to explore how to improve the way in which the needs of children within the primary school who are considered to have special needs are met. It has sought to do this by exploring how to genuinely involve the teacher, parent, and the child themselves in a working relationship which helps ensure those needs are met. As such, at the very least, it should perform the function of improving the lot of the children within the school that the study took place.

In the Spring of 1999 I became the SENCo at the school studied. While this did not impact on the study itself (I finished the data collection process at this time) the new responsibility

has provided me with the opportunity to begin to practically apply the ideas within the study. This has taken the form of a 3 year Action Plan aimed at developing the way in which the teacher plans to meet the child's needs by more genuinely involving the child themselves and their parents, providing a far greater depth and quality of information for parents, and enhancing the role of support staff to help give the children a voice within the decisions made about their learning. This has been linked with an emphasis on the importance of circle time to provide all the children with the skills to put forward what they wish to contribute.

Yet change is difficult, and especially amongst so much change imposed from outside the school at present. At the time of writing a debate has been opened within the school about how the needs of children considered to have special needs are best met, and the role of the parents and child within this, through an ongoing series of staff meetings. This has been backed up by a training programme for all support staff within the school, as well as the writing of a booklet explaining how the school plans the process of meeting children's special needs. A plan is also being implemented to allow parents greater access both to class planning and their own child's records of progress through the school's networked computer systems. This will be a slow process, and probably at times a bumpy one for staff questioning some fundamental assumptions that they hold about children's learning. However, for the children at the school it will hopefully prove to be a successful one.

Further to this interest has been shown in the study both by tutors who train learning support assistants at the University of Central England and by the Educational Psychologist who works at the school studied. The former are interested in how to effectively work with children experiencing difficulties in their learning as well as to enhance the role of support staff within schools. I have been asked to speak to the tutors in one of their weekly meetings. The latter is interested in how to develop the involvement of parents within the planning process of meeting their child's special needs. We have begun to discuss how this could be achieved in the schools that she serves with Stage 3 children (the time when she usually becomes involved with this process within schools).

On a wider scale this study has suggested that the understanding of the detailed factors which influence the quality of relationships between parents, children and teachers in the child's learning may need to be examined again. This has important implications if such

relationships are to be utilised to their full potential. However, this study was a small, single site study and, as such, any conclusions drawn from it would need to be applied with caution. As has already been argued, the use of comparison to the "thick description" will help in this process. However, what would be needed to harden up these tentatively put forward ideas is a study which is focused on the same level of rich detail but took place in several sites. This is beyond the resources of this researcher but it would provide a fascinating, and potentially very useful, area of research for a researcher with the resources to carry out such a study.

Concluding Personal Remarks.

For myself personally this study has been an adventure. At times it has been frustrating as I have had to struggle to improve my skills, both as a researcher and as a writer. However, it has also been exciting and fulfilling in that it has provided me with the opportunity to work at a level of detail that is not available to most teachers in their careers.

Above all, though, the study has challenged my beliefs about how I, and other teachers, should approach the area of children's learning, and especially the value of genuinely involving the child and their parents in the process of deciding on the approach to take to that child's learning. I have been humbled in many ways by the level of miscommunication between teachers within the study and the children and parents that they seek to serve. Part of this is because of the pressures on teachers today, but mainly it is because child and parental perspectives, and level of knowledge, are presumed rather than genuinely sought and valued. If the study has proved anything it is that the children and their parents have a valuable contribution to make concerning how to meet the needs of that child, to help ensure that they have a successful career at school and to overcome difficulties that they face along the way. In most cases they want to make this contribution and it for the school as an institution, and the teachers as individuals, to facilitate this involvement at a genuine level. This is not easy, but if such involvement does not take place the teacher, and the school, risk missing out on a valuable resource as well as denying both parent and child the opportunity of having a genuine involvement in their education.

References.

- Abberley P. (1987), The concept of oppression and the development of a social theory of disability, in Booth T., Swann W., Masterson M. and Potts P., (eds.), *Policy for Diversity in Education* (1992), p 231 - 45, London, Routledge.
- Ainscow M. (1994), *Special Needs in the Classroom*, UNESCO.
- Ainscow M. and Muncey J. (1989), *Meeting Individual Needs*, London, Fulton.
- Ainscow M. (1997), Towards inclusive schooling, in *British Journal of Special Education* 24, 1, 3 - 6.
- Anderson G., Herr K. and Nihlen A. (1994), *Studying your own school*, London, Corwin Press.
- Armstrong D. (1995), *Power and Partnership in Education : Parents, Children and Special Educational Needs*, London, Routledge.
- Armstrong D. and Galloway D. (1992), On being a client ; conflicting perspectives on assessment, in Booth T., Swann W., Masterson M. and Potts P., (eds.) , *Policies for Diversity in Education*, London, Routledge.
- Armstrong D., Galloway D. and Tomlinson S. (1993), Assessing special educational needs: the child's contribution, in *British Educational Research Journal* 19, 2, 121 - 31.
- Armstrong D. and Galloway D. (1996), How children with emotional and behavioural difficulties view professionals, in Davie R. and Galloway D. (eds.) , *Listening to Children in Education*, London, Fulton.
- Atkin J., Bastiani J., and Goode J. (1988), *Listening to Parents : an approach to the improvement of home / school relationships*, London, Croom Helm, Page 24.

Bastiani J. (1993), Parents as partners : genuine progress or empty rhetoric ? in Munn P. (ed.), *Parents and Schools, Customers, Managers or Partners ?*, London, Routledge.

Bearn A. and Smith C. (1998), How learning support is perceived by mainstream colleagues, in *Support for Learning*, **13**, 1, 14 - 9.

Beckman P. and Stepanek J. (1996), Facilitating collaboration in meetings and conferences, in Beckman, *Strategies for Working with Families of Young Children with Disabilities*, Illinois, Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co.

Bennathan M. (1996) , Listening to children in schools - an empirical study, in Davie R. and Galloway D. (eds.) , *Listening to Children in Education*, London, Fulton

Beveridge S. (1997), Implementing partnership with parents in schools, in Wolfendale S. (ed.), *Working with Parents of SEN children after the Code of Practice*, London, Fulton.

Birmingham Local Education Authority (1996, Revised), *Birmingham Special Educational Needs Handbook*, Birmingham, Birmingham City Council.

Booth T., Ainscow M., Black-Hawkins K., Vaughan M., and Shaw L. (2000), *Index for Inclusion - developing learning and participation in schools*, Bristol, Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education.

Bowers T. and Wilkinson D. (1998), The SEN Code of Practice : is it user friendly ? in *British Journal of Special Education*, **25**, 3, 119 - 25.

Braun D. (1992), Working with parents, in Pugh G. (ed.), *Contemporary Issues in the Early Years*, London, Paul Chapman Publishing.

Bryans T., (1989), Parental involvement in primary schools : contemporary issues, in Wolfendale S. (ed.), *Parental Involvement : Developing Networks between School, Home and the Community*, London, Cassell.

Butt N. and Scott E. (1994), Individual education programmes in secondary schools, in *Support for Learning*, 9, 1, 9 - 15.

Carpenter B. (1997) , The interface between the curriculum and the Code, in *British Journal of Special Education* , 24, 1, 18 - 20.

Cole A., Maxwell S. E., and Martin J. M. (1997), Reflected self-appraisals: strength and structure of the relation of the teacher, peer, and parent ratings to children's self-percieved competencies, in *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 89, 1, 55 - 67.

Cooper P. (1993), Learning from pupil's perspectives, in *British Journal of Special Education*, 20, 4, 129 - 33.

Cooper P. (1996), Are Individual Education Plans a waste of paper ? in *British Journal of Special Education*, 23, 3, 115 - 8.

Corbett J. (1996), *Bad mouthing*, London, Falmer Press.

Cowne E. (1998), *The SENCO Handbook : working within a whole school approach (2nd edition)*, London, Fulton.

Crooks B. (1997), Minimising obstacles, maximising opportunities : teachers and black parents, in Bastaini J. (ed.), *Home - School Work in Multi-cultural Settings*, chapter 5, London, Fulton.

Dale N. (1996), *Working with Families of Children with Special Needs*, London, Routledge.

Davies J. D. (1996), Pupil's views on special needs practice, in *Support for Learning*, 11, 4, 157 - 61.

Derrington C., Evans C., and Lee B. (1996), *The Code in Practice - the impact on schools and LEAs*, Slough, NFER.

Department for Education (1994), *Code Of Practice (on the identification and assessment of special educational needs)*, Department for Education, HMSO.

Department for Education and Employment (2000), *Code of Practice (Revised draft)*.

Department of Health (1989), *The Child Act*, London, HMSO.

Docking J. W. (1990), *Primary Schools and Parents*, London, Hodder and Stoughton.

Donaldson M. (1978), *Children's Minds*, Glasgow, Falmer.

Dwivedi K. N. (1996), Race and the child's perspective, in Davie R., Upton G., and Varma V. (eds.), *The voice of the Child : a handbook for professionals*, London, Falmer Press.

Eaton M. and Dembo M. (1997), Differences in the motivational beliefs of Asian American and non-Asian students, in *Journal of Educational Psychology*, **89**, 3, 433 - 9.

Ferris A. (1997), Bridging the gap between home and school, in Bastaini J. (ed.), *Home - School Work in Multi-cultural Settings*, chapter 4, London, Fulton.

Feiler A. and Gibson H. (1999), Threats to the inclusive movement, in *British Journal of Special Education*, **26**, 3, 147 - 51.

Fraser P. (1986), Black perspectives on British education, in Gundara J. And Jones C., (eds.), *Racism, Diversity and Education*, chapter 3, London, Hodder and Stoughton.

Furze T. and Conrad A. (1997), A review of Parent Partnership Schemes, in Wolfendale S. (ed.), *Working with Parents of SEN Children after the Code of Practice*, London, Fulton.

Galloway D. and Leo E., (1995), Motivational styles in English and mathematics among children identified as having special educational needs, in *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, **65**, 477 - 87.

Garner P. and Sandow S. (eds.) (1995), *Advocacy, Self-advocacy and Special Needs*, London, Fulton.

Gasgoinge E. (1995), *Working with Parents as Partners in SEN*, London, Fulton.

Gersch I. (1996), Listening to children in educational contexts, in Davie R., Upton G. and Varma V., *The Voice of the Child : a handbook for professionals*, London, Falmer Press.

Ghaill M. (1995), Young, gifted and black : Methodological reflections of a teacher / researcher, in Walford G. (ed.), *Doing Educational Research*, London, Routledge.

Ghuman P. (1997), Assimilation or integration ? A study of Asian adolescents, in *Educational Research*, **39**, 1, 23 - 33.

Gillborn D. and Gipps C. (1996), *Recent Research on the Achievements of Ethnic Minority Pupils*, London, HMSO.

Gillespie C. (1996), Special educational needs and equal opportunities, in *Education Review*, **10**, 1, 56 - 9.

Goddard A. (1997), The role of individual education plans \ programmes in special education: A critique, in *Support for Learning*, **12**, 4, 170 - 4.

Gross J. (1996), *Special Educational Needs in the Primary School*, Buckingham, Open University Press.

Grugeon E. (1990), Ruled out or rescued ? A Statement for Balbinder, in Booth T., Swann W., Masterson M. and Potts P., (eds.), *Policies for Diversity in Education*, London, Routledge.

Hall D. (1996), *Assessing the Needs of Bilingual Pupils*, London, Fulton.

Hammersley M. (1993), The teacher-as researcher; in Hammersley M. (ed.), *Educational Research : current issues (volume 1)*, London, Paul Chapman Publishing Ltd..

Hancock R. (1998), Building home - school liaison into classroom practice : a need to understand the nature of a teacher's working day, in *British Educational Research Journal*, 24, 4, 409 - 11.

Haroun R. and O' Hanlon C. (1997), Do teachers and students agree in their perception of what school discipline is ? , in *Educational Review*, 49, 3, 237 - 50.

Hart S. (1992), Differentiation - way forward or retreat ?, in Peter M. (ed.), *Differentiation - Ways Forward*, pp. 10 - 2, Tamworth, NASEN.

Hart S. (1998), Paperwork or practice ? Shifting the emphasis of the Code towards teaching, learning and inclusion, in *Support for Learning*, 13, 2, 76 - 81.

Hegarty S. (1993), Home - school relations (a perspective from special education), in Munn P. (ed.), *Parents and Schools, Customers, Mangers or Partners ?*, London, Routledge.

Houlton D. (1986), *Cultural Diversity in the Primary School*, London, Batsford Academic.

Ingram J. and Worrall N. (1993), *Teacher - Child Partnership - the negotiating classroom*, London, Fulton.

Jowett S. (1991), *Building Bridges : Parental Involvement in Schools*, Windsor, NFER - Nelson.

Knill B. and Humphreys K. (1996), Parental preference and its impact upon a market force approach to special education, in *British Journal of Special Education*, **23**, 1, 30-4.

Long R., (1986), *Developing Parental Involvement in Primary Schools*, London, Macmillan Education.

Mallett R. (1997), A parental perspective on partnership, in Wolfendale S. (ed.), *Working with Parents of SEN Children after the Code of Practice*, London, Fulton.

McHardy C. (1996), Being a teacher - researcher : issues of insider participant teacher research methodology, in *Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties*, **1**, 2, 3 - 14.

McLaughlin M. (1995), Defining special education : a response to Zigmond and Baker, in *The Journal of Special Education*, **29**, 2, 200 - 7.

Mills R. and Mills J. (1993), *Bilingualism in the Primary School*, London, Routledge.

Norwich B. (1999), The connotation of special education labels for professionals in the field, in *British Journal of Special Education*, **26**, 4, 179 - 83.

OFSTED (1997), *The SEN Code of Practice : two years on*, London, HMSO.

OFSTED (1999), *The SEN Code of Practice : three years on. The contribution of Individual Education Plans to Raising the Standards for Pupils with Special Educational Needs*, London, HMSO.

Phillips C. and Birrell H. (1994), Number learning of Asian pupils in English primary schools, in *Educational Research*, **36**, 1, 51 - 61.

Riddell S., Brown S., and Duffield J. (1994), Parental power and special educational needs : the case of specific learning difficulties, in *British Educational Research Journal*, **20**, 4, 327 - 43.

Roaf C. and Bines H. (1994), Learner needs or learner rights, in Pollard A. and Browne J. (eds.), *Teaching and Learning in the Primary School*, chapter 6, London, Routledge.

Roller J. (1998), Facilitating pupil involvement in assessment, planning and review processes, in *Educational Psychology in Practice*, **13**, 4, 266 - 73.

Rose R., McNamara S., and J. O'Neil, (1996), Promoting the greater involvement of pupils with special needs in the management of their own assessment and learning processes, in *British Journal of Special Education*, **23**, 4, 166 - 70.

Ross E. M. (1996), Learning to listen to children, in Davie R., Upton G., and Varma V., *The Voice of the Child : a handbook for professionals*, London, Falmer Press.

Russell P. (1996a), Listening to children with SEN, in Davie R. and Galloway D. (eds.), *Listening to Children in Education*, London, Fulton.

Russell P. (1996b), Listening to children with disabilities and special educational needs, in Davie R., Upton G., and Varma V., *The Voice of the Child : a handbook for professionals*, London, Falmer Press.

Russell P. (1997), Parents as partners - some early impressions of the impact of the Code of Practice, in Wolfendale S. (ed.), *Working with Parents of SEN Children after the Code of Practice*, London, Fulton.

Sadow S. (ed.) (1994), *Whose Special Need ? Some Perceptions of Special Educational Needs*, London, Paul Chapman Publishing.

Schofield J. W. (1989), Increasing the generizability of qualitative research, in Hammersley M. (ed.), *Educational Research : current issues (volume 1)* (1993), London, Paul Chapman Publishing Ltd..

Seligman M. and Darling R. B. (1997), *Ordinary Families, Special Children*, Chicago, The Guilford Press.

Shu-Minulti K. (1995), Family support : diversity, disability and delivery, in Garcia E. (ed.), *Meeting the Challenge of Linguistic and Cultural Diversity in Early Childhood*, New York, Teacher's College Press.

Simeonsson R. J., Edmonson R., Smith T., Carnahan S., and Bucy J.E. (1995), Family involvement in multidisciplinary team evaluation : professional and parent perspectives, in *Child : Care, Health and Development*, **21**, 3, 199 - 213.

Solity J. (1992), *Special Education*, London, Cassell.

Thomas G. (1995), Special needs at risk ? in *Support for Learning*, **10**, 3, 104-12.

Thomas G. (1997), Inclusive schools for an inclusive society, in *British Journal of Special Education*, **24**, 3, 103 - 7.

Tisdall G. and Dawson R. (1994), Listening to the children : interviews with children attending a mainstream support facility, in *Support for Learning*, **9**, 4, 179 - 82.

Tizard B. and Hughes M. (1995), Reflections on Young Children learning, in Walford G. (ed.) *Doing Educational Research*, London, Routledge.

Tod J., Castle F. and Blamires M. (1998), *Individual Education Plans - Implementing Effective Practice*, London, Fulton.

Tod J. (1999), IEPs : Inclusive educational practices ?, in *Support for Learning*, **14**, 4, 184 - 7.

Tomlinson S (1984), *Home and School in Multicultural Britain*, London, Batsford Academic.

Tomlinson S. (1986) , Ethnicity and educational achievement, in Modgil S., Verma G.K., Mallick K., and Modgil C. (eds.), *Multicultural Education - the interminable debate*, London, Falmer Press.

Tomlinson S. (1993), Ethnic minorities (involved partners or problem parents ?), in Munn P. (ed.), *Parents and Schools, Customers, Managers or Partners ?*, London Routledge.

Trier S. (1997), Promoting the effective practice of partnership, in Wolfendale S. (ed.), *Working with Parents of SEN Children after the Code of Practice*, London, Fulton.

United Nations (1989), *Convention on the Rights of the Child*.

Vlachou A. (1997), *Struggles for Inclusive Education*, Buckingham, Open University Press.

Vincent C. (1996), *Parents and Teachers - Power and Participation*, London, Falmer Press

Vincent C. and Tomlinson S. (1997), Home - school relationships : " the swarming of disciplinary mechanisms " ?, in *British Educational Research Journal*, **23**, 3, 361 - 71.

Wade B. and Moore M. (1994), Feeling different : viewpoints of students with Special Educational Needs, in *British Journal of Special Education*, **21**, 4, 161 - 5.

Wearmouth J. (1999), Another one flew over : "maladjusted" Jack's perception of his label, in *British Journal of Special Education*, **26**, 1, 15 - 21.

Wilson J. (1999), Some conceptual difficulties about "inclusion", in *Support for Learning*, 14, 3, 110 - 112.

Wolfendale S. (1992), *Empowering Parents and Teachers - working for the children*, London, Cassell.

Wolfendale S. (1993), *Primary Schools and Special Needs*, London, Cassell.

Wolfendale S. (1997a), Encouraging parental views as part of statutory assessment : an analysis of local authorities special educational needs documentation produced for parents, in *Support for Learning*, 12, 3, 112-6.

Wolfendale S. (1997b), Delivering services for children with special needs : the place of parents, in Wolfendale S (ed.), *Working with Parents of SEN Children after the Code of Practice*, London, Fulton.

Appendix 1 - Interview transcripts for the Negus grouping of relationships (known as Henry in the body of the text)

Interview with Mother - Ms. St. (known as Parent H) - 25 / 11/ 98.

This interview took place at the end of the school day in my classroom. Negus and his brother had gone home with a friend. Ms. St. is not a very confident lady and appeared unsure of herself to begin with. I had a long history of friendship with her, having taught Negus in Reception and we spent a few moments catching up with each other. This appeared to relax Ms. St. a little and she appeared more comfortable when I started the interview proper.

T - To begin with I'd like to ask you a bit of background information....

St. - Uh um.

T - ..About yourself and your family. Is that OK ?

St. - Yes.

T - Were you born in this country ?

St. - Yes.

T - You were. And were you educated.....

St. - In this country ? Yes.

T - Were you educated in Handsworth ?

St. - No. I was educated in West Bromwich.

T - Did you enjoy school yourself ?

St. - Not really.

T - Not really..... What didn't you enjoy about it ?

St. - It was more or less that I was ignorant. I didn't want to enjoy it.

T - Right.

St. - (laughs) Generally everything I didn't enjoy.

T - Right. So you just didn't find it very relevant

St. - Not even that it's. relevant.....um.....I just didn't enjoy it. Particular lessons I enjoyed but not the whole school.

T - Right.....

St. - I found most of the teachers quite ignorant.

T - Right.....in what way ?

St. - It was their way and no other way.....and I'm a kind of independent person that likes her way so we clashed.....as simple as that.

T - Right. Do you think that that had anything to do with your culture ?

St. - No...um....because mum was an older generation and she didn't really have a culture as such. It was probably because I was the total opposite to mum.....it was a problem kind of thing.

T - Right.....did you enjoy primary school at all ?

St. - Primary school I more remember my friends ...I don't remember actual lessons.....I do remember certain lessons which I enjoyed as I said. The same way with secondary school. But I don't remember actual teachers and things like that. They didn't really.....

T - So you have kind of wiped your mind of all that.....

St. - (laughs loudly for a few seconds)

T - Right.....what I thought we could do to make things a bit easier is the first part I would really like to find out what Negus is good at at school and what you think he is not so good at - what he finds difficult.

St. - Right.

T - And there might be some that fit in the middle. And what I have done is I have made some cards. I did have a board to put them on but someone must have moved it while I was away (I had just returned from a week off school due to illness and a lot of things had been moved around !). There are quite a few of them so if maybe put the things that you think he would be good at there - the things he would find easy at school. And put the things that he wouldn't be so good at here.....

St. - OK.

T - (interrupted by a teacher entering the classroom for a few seconds). Is that OK ?

St. - Yes (sorts them out in 30 seconds with no changes once decided but does spread them out to check through both extremes). That is where I put the ones he is good at....finds easy ?

T - Yes..... (pointing) the things he finds easy and the things that he finds difficult.....some might seem a bit strange.

St. - What is in betweenhere ? (giggles)

T - Yes.

St. - This is difficult (holds card that says science work) because it is getting to actual lessons. He is at a beginning...do you know what I mean.....where he is not finding it too difficult.....so it is in between then.....

T - OK. So these are the ones that he finds easy.....

St. - Easy.

T - Do you think that I have missed any out or anything that I should have put in ?

St. - No. It's.....with the things that he finds difficult I wouldn't say that he finds it difficult it's. the way that he has been taught that he finds difficult.....do you understand what I mean ?

T - Yes.

St. - So I put that in there (OK pile) not saying that he couldn't do it.....it's. just that he can't get what he's. been.....he's. been taught then.

T - Right. OK ...doing maths, concentrating in class, understanding what the teacher says, asking for help.....

St. - Uh um.

T - Are the difficult ones. And the ones that are OK are finding out things, writing, reading, spelling, science, listening to the teacher, keeping your temper and the ones he finds easy are being good in class, helping each other, working with other children, playing in the playground, making things, singing and being quiet in class.....

St. - Yes.

T - Out of those ones that you have chosen that he finds easy why would you say that he finds those particularly easy ?

St. -Because he is a person child.....he loves other people.

T - Right (interrupted by another teacher coming into the classroom - unworried and settles again quickly).

St. - So anything connecting and just loves singing anyway....anything connecting with somebody else he finds that.....that's. probably his upbringing..... I don't know, I've probably put that over that into his headI've always said brothers...share and that.....and he takes it on board

T - Right.....with these ones they are mainly subjects aren't they....the ones that you find OK.

St. - Well I wouldn't say OK. He's. catching on to the way he is being taught now and what he's. actually supposed to be doing.

T - OK. When you say the way that he's. been taught what do you mean by that ?

St. - Um.....

T - Can you explain that for me ?

St. - Um....In my day the way that I was taught it it was literally...it was there.....it was no imagination or whatever and now it's. more imagination and using your own initiative which he doesn't.....he finds that hard.....

T - Right.

St. - So like if it's basically put down and it's said this is how you have got to do it he gets it...

T - Right....yes...

St. - If you say try and work it out for yourself he will sit there and think that he can't do it so he doesn't.....he finds that hard so that's. why I said that.

T - Right....so asking for help....

St. - Yes.

T - He finds that difficult ?

St. - Yes. Cause he thinks because he's. asked he's. done it wrong anyway without even trying because that is what he has been told.....he's. got to do it himself. So asking for help is like he's. defeated the object already.

T - So he feels that he shouldn't ask for help

St. - That's. it.

T - That's interesting..... (St.. is silent)

T - Out of these which one do you think that he finds the most difficult ? Because you have chosen one that is a subject.....

St. - Yes, numbers confuses him.....

T - Uhuh.....and then you have got concentrating and asking for help.....I suppose those go together do they ?

St. - Well no.....concentrating in class is dependant on who he is withcause he centres on the person who is closest.....as I said he is a person person....so that over rules whatever whoever is saying.....he concentrates more on the persons who are at the side.....um.....asking for help is just the thought that he doesn't want to do it.....he thinks that he is kind of showing himself up.....kind of thing. I think this would be the most difficult.....(understanding what the teacher says)

T - Right.....why would you say that ?

St. - Basically for what I said before....it's. a tendency to sayif he's. got the teacher.....as I said he relates to if you are at the side but if you are standing over there he kind of wavers...he doesn't understand what you are saying becauseyou're....if he can see it he will do it...if you are pointing to it and showing itverbally if you are speaking it he doesn't get it. Do you know what I mean ?

T - Yes.....

St. - It's. kind of like more a seeing person....he has to see it....facts based on this whereas if you are talking and he can't actually see it's. very hard for him to understand. I would say that that would be the most difficult.

T - Right.....and you think that that is because of the way that he was taught when he came into school ?

St. - Basically yes.

T - Right. That's interesting.

St. - Yes - different methods for different children. You know... and the majority will get it and then there will be a minority who just can't click.

T - Yes.

St. - And that's. what he can't click on.

T - Yes particularly if he finds it difficult to focus on something...

St. - That is the whole class. That's. something he doesn't relate to.

T - So he benefits more from sort of one to one.....

St. - Yes, but then it's. getting him over the thing that he's. the same as the other person because he literally fights.....he fought about being took out of class and being taught on a singularyou know, because he felt like he was leaving his friends and likeit was kind of like separating him. But um his teacher what he's got now seems to have got a nice medium in between. He's. separated but he's. notI don't know, probably he's. grown up but he seems to accept it a lot more and thinks it is for his benefit kind of thing and not to punish him.

T - So when he's. separated he feels like he is being punished ?

St. - Punished.....mentally that is what he was thinking which I didn't know until he told me.

T - He actually volunteered that ?

St. - He gave me that information - yes. Which is very hard because he is a very shy person.

T - That's a very mature thing to do isn't it ?

St. - Well he is very mature in a lot of ways.

T - Yes, he is....

St. - He's. very mature in a lot of ways especially when it is looking after and other people. On the literal work and books and stuff he might not be there but otherwise he is very there - more than his age is.

T - Has the school told you what Negus is good at and what Negus finds difficult ?

St. - Um.

T - How have they told you that ?

St. - Meetings, meetings after schooland me asking when they didn't tell me.

T - Do you feel that you have had to go and ask ?

St. - Yes, at the beginning.....yes.

T - Do you feel that the school hasn't given you enough information then ?

St. - At the beginning, yes (laughs). I'm sorry.

T - No, no that's. fine. Try to think of me as someone outside of school. I'm not going to take what you say personally (I taught Negus when he first came into school) or anything like that.

St. - OK.

T - I'm genuinely interested in what you are saying. If you had been able to arrange things in the perfect world how would you have preferred teachers in the school to have dealt with Negus and telling you things ?

St. - To me personally... I think it would have been better if they had asked me more instead of telling me what they were going to do....ask me if it would benefit him in any way.

T - Yes.

St. - And it probably would of got to the stage where it is now a lot quicker than what he did.

T - Yes.

St. - You know ? It was.... to me it was somebody else coming to....how would you say ?
...um...they brought in somebody else out to.....

T - Assess ?

St. - Assess, yes, to assess him and she caught on straight away...exactly what I was saying for two to three years... you know ?.... and to me that shouldn't have happened.

T - Yes. Right....

St. - So that in a way....just by listening would have been better.

T - Did you feel at that time the teachers were approachable - that you could go up and ask them ?

St. - I did approach them (voice became a little broken and angry here) and nothing wasn't done. It's not to say I didn't try and when I did see that there was a problem I did tell them that there was a problem. They told me that there wasn't a problem....to give it time do you know what I mean ? It was all of a sudden after this time and he was so far behind all of a sudden "you've got a problem ". You know, which I have been telling them for two years that we've got a problem. So listening and taking on board what you had said. Alright I'm not a teacher but I do know my child.

T - And probably much better than teachers do....

St. - That's. it.

T - So how do you feel about that (I said this to try and vent some of the feelings so that it would not interfere with the rest of the interview).

St. - Um....I don't feel any way now because it's. gone past...it was ages back....if he had still stayed in that mode and hadn't got out of the mode I would be pretty upset...you know ?

T - Yes.

St. - But now that it has gone and he is enjoying it....I mean I always knew that he loved to learn... but he was never given that chance to learn because it wasn't there for him...he couldn't understand what was there so everything was difficulty and he couldn't do it.

T - Right. Yes.

St. - So you can understand how I felt because it was like he was at school here and then he was at school at home because it was like fighting two battles....

T - It must have been very hard for you...

St. - It was and that went on for a year and a half.

T - Um... and how did Negus feel during that ?

St. - Very frustrated because, you know, while all the other kids were out there playing he was inside working...so it was like a double punishment. Do you know what I mean ?

T - Yes.

St. - When he didn't want to do it it was me who was the bad one saying well you had to do it or you had to do this...you know..

T - Is that mainly why the school got you involved when he didn't want to do....

St. - Yes. Because it started showing in his behaviour then. He started reacting then...kids being kids children in the class started teasing him and I think that must have stopped now because he realises that he is getting older and sitting there and drawing ain't going to do him anything.

T - Right.

St. - So he had to work and he had to put his head down. I think it was a mutual decision - me pushing him and him deciding that he wants to be able to do it.

T - So you'd say that I guess he became frustrated and that led to him.....

St. - Yes. As I said in other ways he is very mature and he realised for himself " aye, aye ".

You know ? And I did something real hard which I hated doing - I didn't teach him. He got really upset and, you know, it got to the stage where he is old enough to decide for himself.

So I let him. He had a spelling test and he failed miserably. And the teacher was kind of commiserating and I said no this is what you get if you don't work - because he was really upset already and with her commiserating it was like OK it's. alright, it's. OK but I said well no it's. not OK this is what you get. And we worked at the next set of spellings and he got two wrong and he was upset because he got the two wrong whereas before he was upset becausehe didn't care then...he didn't care until he got to the stage where he'd failed miserably and the rest of the pupils said oh you couldn't spell this and you couldn't spell that. He thought well he wasn't having it so we worked at it and he got two wrong. So I don't know if I've gone too far and he wants perfection now (laughs - breaks tension)

T - (laughs along).

St. - But he gets there.

T - Right. So basically he made his own decision.....

St. - Uhuh.

T -Gosh... that is mature....

St. - Very mature. I'm very proud of him.

T - And you feel that you had to take that action of I'm not going to help you to.....

St. - Yes. Probably with somebody else, with another child, I wouldn't have taken that decision because they wouldn't have given a damn but as I said with Negus he is mature in his outlook and he thought, well I don't want to be the one that they are teasing and I don't want to be the one that can't do it. I want to read my books and I want to read what I can do so he did.

T - Right. So are you still involved in helping.....

St. - Not as much because I do work but I try to get in there and spend some time with him...

T - In class....

St. - No, not in class. More at home now because the teaching is gelling with what I do at home anyway so it is just a case of not putting that emphasis on it but just helping, you know, pushing him in the right direction. For instance, shall I give you a for instance ?

T - Yes, that's. fine, yes.

St. - (giggles) Yesterday his teacher was saying that he finds it very difficult to count up in twos and to count up in fives. he can do it in tens but he just can't get the rhyme. So we were in the car and I make it a family thing so he is singing along 2,4,6,8 and he did it all the way up to a hundred no problem...

T - Great !

St. - And he did it all in fives up to a hundred as well. And I said do you see the pattern and he says oh yes !!!!! and I started doing it with one do ten and the other do twenty and then thirty . You know, not a problem. So that.....them little things I work with him on.

T - You said that....um...that the teaching from the teacher is beginning to gel with what you are teaching. How do you actually know that ? Do you meet together or....

St. - Yes. I come in every so often in the week and I'll ask how's he been doing and what not and she'll say well she's. had difficulty with this section of work and I'll take that section home and more or less he will breeze through it because he hasn't got that distraction. Or he wants to go and play his game or he wants to..... he can't do it without the game. We got to the stage where the crying -you know you can cry for two hours but you still have to do this and you can't play the game until you have finished. And if it is too late you can't play the game because you have got to go to bed. So it's. a case of doing it and not moaning about it - just do it and get on with it so he can do whatever he wants to do. So there....

T - Do you know the provision that the school has made for Negus ?

St. - Yes.

T - In the class they are taught in groups....

St. - Right.

T - Is there any specialised work that is done.....

St. - He does go out of school and he is put in provisions for seven and a half hours a week on his own cause he's. special needs.

T - Right.

St. - So he's. got that - which as I said he has improved tremendously but to me if he's. got that seven and a half hours plus - you know it can only be for the beneficial of him. So to me

that's. fine. You know, even though he's. past the criteria where he does need the work or he is getting to that stage I would still like the seven and a half hours.

T - Right. Yes, I can understand that. And do you know what he is taught in those sessions.

St. - Well he's. taught what.... a variety ofbasically what they said that he needs is understanding of what is being said in lessons... because that is what he can't understand... the way it's. aid he just can't click to. As I said he needs to be literally shown what to do...cause once he gets it he never forgets it.

T - Yes, right.

St. - Do you know what I mean, he's. that kind of child. You have to get him to get it first if you know what I mean....so.

T - Do you think that Negus is going to stop having the difficulties that he is experiencing with the understanding ?

St. - As he grows....as his basis grows, do you know what I mean ? As I said once he gets it he understands it, he never loses it.....but as that base grows then yes. I do think so because he does love to learn. You've never seen a happier child than when he gets something right.

T - Yes, that smile....

St. - Yes, he's. just blooming you know ?! So yes I do think that.

T - So you think that he is going to basically grow out of it ?

St. - Yes, I do.

T - Right. A bit of a strange question. What do you think that Negus is actually taught at school ?

St. - (no reply).

T - In terms of subjects or skills or whatever. I'm just trying to explore a little bit how much you know about what go on in the classroom.

St. - Right ! Well he does now come up and tell me about the old days, Tudors days. He can point out about houses and when they were made. He will talk about plants and I know he does growing them. He absolutely loves art - always has. Um..... maths he isn't too sure about because I don't hear much about numbers. He doesn't calculate numbers.

T - Right and that got put in with the difficult ones as well.

St. - He does find it really hard. Um.. his reading and his writing - which he is beginning to love. He loves his neat little writing - he's. just got to speed up a little bit...(laughs)

T - (joins in laughter) Yes, that can take a while.....

St. - He does tend to want perfection more than anything. I think that was the most difficult part for him in the writing. It's. not that he couldn't write it's. that he didn't like to get the word wrong so he had to cross it out. It didn't look nice then so, you know, he wouldn't get past the stage where I'm not going to write it if I'm not going to get it. You had to write it on a piece of paper so that he could copy it down. You know...?

T - So he wouldn't try spelling it for himself...

St. - Right. You know he's very funny in that sense and the teacher wanted him to... even if he got part of the word right as long as he got part of the word right that was OK but he couldn't....he couldn't.....

T - Accept that ?

St. - That wasn't right as far as he was concerned. that wasn't right. That isn't how you say the word.

T - So he wanted every word perfect.

St. - Perfect and that was what held him back a lot too.

T - With his maths does he get any extra help with his maths in that seven and a half hours ?

St. - I don't know exactly what..... I mean we haven't ... we don't know if he's got it yet. We don't know....

T - Oh, he hasn't started....

St. - No, he had three and a half hours and they want to increase it to seven and a half hours...um.... I think they have more concentrated on his spellings and his reading more than his maths.

T - Why do you think that they are concentrating on those ?

St. - Because basically maths you still have to read the question. So if you haven't got that basis you are still going to find that hard to do.

T - Right.....within the class do you know how Negus is taught ? How the teacher teaches in the classroom ?

St. - Well more or less they have put a boy that is about his level but his weaknesses are Negus's. strengths and his strengths are Negus's. weaknesses kind of thing. So they both gel together and because I said he finds it very hard to understand what the teacher says the boy now... that's. his strength.

T - Right, yes.

St. - So it's. helping Negus to keep up with what is going on in the class and working it literal out is Negus's. strength so it's. helping the boy as well. So it's. like a tripod. That's. how it's. being taught anyway.

T - Did the teacher tell you that or did you see that when you went into the classroom ?

St. - I was told (very definite). I haven't actually been into the classroom and Negus has actually said that to me as well. How he's. being taught and how he's. enjoying that way and because he's. helping as well....that's. part of his strength. He feels....

T - Yes that would benefit him...

St. - Yes.

T - (after a short pause) is there anything that you would like to add to what we have said or do you think that I have missed anything out ?

St. - No. I think I have chatted too much actually ! (giggles)

T - No, no. It's. been fascinating. Thank you very, very much.

A little later (while chatting informally after the interview was finished -from memory)

T - Would you like a copy of what we said ?

St. - A copy.

T - To keep so you have a record of what we said in case you think I might change things ! (I have offered to show all the parents the project write up)

St. - No. What I have said is the truth. I don't mind who knows it. It's the truth and that is that..

Interview with Negus (known as Henry) - July 1998.

This interview took place towards the end of the Summer term. It took place within school time and Negus was taken from a lesson to help me. It took place within my classroom - the children were elsewhere. Negus had been given a few days notice and the purpose of the interview was explained at that time. Negus appeared comfortable and confident. We spent a few moments chatting generally before I began the interview just to settle him. I also showed Negus the tape machine and the microphone, as he appeared interested in how I was recording the interview.

A- So Negus, what I would like to do is to think with you about the things that you do at school, alright. To think about the things that you find easy to do at school and the things that you find difficult at school, and to think about the reasons why you find them easy and difficult. Is that OK ? So, what I thought that we would do to begin with is play a game, OK. It's got a bit folded now. I have got lots of things here that you do at school (show Negus cards) and what I would like to do, if I read them out for you could you tell me whether you find them difficult at school, whether you find them easy at school, or if they are OK or you are not quite sure put them in the middle. So, shall we start with working with other children. Do you find that an easy thing to do at school or a difficult thing ? (this introduction was done slowly with gaps between the sentences to make sure that he had understood what I had said. Negus appeared to still be confident and comfortable with what was happening. he was making eye contact and sitting back in his seat)

N- Um difficult.

A- you find that difficult. OK. What about reading ? Do you find that easy or difficult ?

N- Easy.

A- you find that easy. OK. What about writing ? Is that something that you find easy to do, or difficult to do ?

N- Difficult.

A- You find writing difficult. OK. What about spelling ?

N- Difficult.

A- You find that difficult. OK. What about understanding what the teacher says ? You know, they tell you something and you have to go and do it

N- Difficult.

A- Difficult OK. What about concentrating in class ? Is that something that you find easy to do, or difficult ?

N- Difficult.

A- You find that difficult as well. OK. Do you find it easy or difficult to ask the teacher for help ?

N- Easy.

A- you find it easy. you don't have any problems asking for help. OK. What about science ?

N- Difficult.

A- you find science difficult. OK. Do you find it easy to keep your temper in school ? Or difficult ?

N- Difficult.

A- you find it difficult, you lose your temper quite a bit ?

N- Yes.

A- OK. What about maths ?

N- I find maths easy.

A- You find maths easy. OK. We'll put it there. What about making things ? Things like Design and Technology.

N- Easy.

A- you find that easy. OK, you enjoy that.

N- Yes.

A- OK. What about singing ?

N- easy.

A- you find that easy as well. What about being quiet in class. Is that something that you find easy to do or difficult ?

N- difficult.

A- you find it difficult to be quiet. What about playing in the playground ?

N- Easy.

A- Because you play football a lot don't you ?

N- Yes. Yes.

A- What about being good in class ? Do you find that an easy thing to do or a difficult thing ?

N- Easy.

A- You don't find any problem being good in class. Ms Gwinnell (his current teacher) shouting Negus will you be good ! (I was teasing him here and he was grinning broadly)

N- no !

A- What about helping others ?

N- Easy.

A- you find that easy. And finding out things.

N- Easy.

A- you don't have any problems with that. OK. So, let's just move that away (the board). Let's look at the things that you find easy to begin with. (I then list the things that N. has said that

he finds easy). Which ones of those do you find the easiest ? Out of those, if you had to choose one or two which you find really, really easy which ones would it be.

N- This one is really easy.

A- Making things. OK. And which other ones ?

N- And reading.

A- you find reading really, really easy. OK, let's move those out of the way (the other easy cards). So why do you think that you find making things really, really easy ?

N um, because

A- Do you think that you are good at making things ?

N- Yes.

A- right, OK. Um, do you find it easy to put things together or

N- yes I find it easy to put the things together.

A - Do you have lots of ideas about what to do ?

N- Sometimes.

A- sometimes. Do you like making them yourself or do you like working with other children ?

N- Making it by myself.

A- Right. Do you like working in a group with other children ?

N- Um yes.

A- you do, right. OK, what about reading ? (at this point I was interrupted by another teacher)

Sorry, reading. Why do you think that you find reading very easy ?

N- because I can sound out words in reading.

A- OK. Do you read a lot ?

N- Yes.

A- Do you read a lot at home ?

N- Yes.

A- What sort of books do you read ?

N- Um

A- what are your favourite books ?

N- (mumbles to himself for a few seconds, but indistinctly).

A- that means which books do you like best

N- Uh

A- Do you like things like Goosebumps or Roald Dahl or adven

N- Goosebumps !

A- You like the scary ones ?

N- Yes !

A- Everybody seems to like those (we laugh together). Do you watch it on TV as well ?

N- Yes.

A- Right, well they are good stories aren't they ?

N- Yes.

A- OK. So you think you are a good reader. Great. Let's just put those to one side for a minute and let's look at the things that you said that you find quite difficult (I read them to him and spread the cards out on the table. As I read them through Negus changes his mind about working with other people and decides it should not be there. We move it out.). So ... let's see do you lose your temper a lot, then ?

N- Quite a bit.

A- What makes you lose your temper ?

N- Um it's when I, um when I do spellings, right, and I can't spell and I tell the teacher and the teacher is working with other people

A- rightand so what does she do ?

N- well, sometimes I lose my temper

A- right so do you lose your temper because she wont help you or because you can't do the spellings ?

N- Because I can't do the spellings.

A - Right. Why do you get so cross when you can't do the spellings ? Do you feel that you should be able to do them ?

N- (nods head, but looked a little shamefaced at this time).

A- Right. Do you mind if you get them wrong sometimes ?

N- Yes.

A- You do mind. So you like to get everything right ?

N- Yes ! (very definite here)

A- Oh, right. So, what do you do when you lose your temper ?

N- Get sent out of the classroom.

A- Right. do you start throwing things around or jump up and down and go ahhhhhhh !

N- (smiling broadly) No ! I used to kick the chairs a lot

A- so you used to walk round the classroom kicking chairs ?

N- Yes.

A- Right. So, what do you do now ?

N- I go to Mr. Leach's room and when I get back my temper I go back and say sorry.

A- So do you get in a lot of trouble for losing your temper ?

N- Yes.

A- Right. Do you think that that is fair

N- No.

A- what d you think should happen when you lose your temper ?

N- Calm down.

A- do you mind being sent to Mr. Leach ?

N- No.

A- No. Does he get cross with you ?

N- Not really.

A- No. OK. so, with keeping your temper is it the same as writing as well ?

N- yes.

A- so you would put spelling and writing together ?

N- Yes.

A- Is it the same with science ?

N- Yes !

A- So you findyou find those difficult if you can't get them right and the teacher isn't there to help you lose your temper (N. nods head definitely). OK. With science do you find the writing difficult or is it the thinking ?

N- it's my thinking.

A- right. why do you think that you find that difficult ?

N- Um why do I find that difficult ? (in a whisper)

A- It's alright, take your time there is no hurry you just find thinking the ideas through

N- Yes.

A- very difficult. OK. With that one, understanding what the teacher says, do you think with your science and your spelling when your teacher explains things to you do you think that you understand what they say to you ?

N- Um difficult.

A- You find that difficult ? (N. nodded head). Why do you think that you find that difficult ?

N-

A- Is it because you don't listen or because you listen very carefully but still can't work it out ?

N- It's just that I don't listen.

A- you feel that you don't listen ?

N- Yes.

A- Is that what you really feel or are you just saying that for me ?

N- that's what I really feel (I felt he was being genuine here).

A- So do you think that you could understand more if you listened more carefully ?

N- Yes.

A- Right. Do you know why you don't listen very carefully ?

N- Because I always talk to my friends too much (both laugh together).

A- Right, so that's where the being quiet in class comes in. OK. So, what gets you talking to your friends ?

N- Um because we always sit by each other, that is all.

A- so you get distracted by them. So what happens when you start talking to them ?

N- You don'tyou don't know what to do.

A- Right. Oh, I see. Right, you miss out

N- Yes .

A- on all the things that Ms. Gwinnell says and then you are stuck.

N- Uh-huh.

A- OK. Does she spot you talking ?

N- Yes (laughs)

A- She does. So what does she say to you ?

N- it's that she says to me stop talking.

A- right so do you think if you listened more carefully you would find your spelling and your writing and science easy ?

N- Yes.

A- Right. so you think that it is the listening thing, that if you got better at listening and you didn't have all your friends around you

N- Yes.

A- that you wouldn't find all these things difficult at all. That we could take those out and put them on here (N. nodded). OK. With concentrating in class, is that because you talk with your friends ?

N- Yes.

A- Right, but you find it easy when you really listen you find it easy to understand what Ms. Gwinnell says ? You don't have any problems with that ? (N. shook head here). OK. Do you think that Ms. Gwinnell knows that's what you think about what you do in school ?

N- yes.

A- Right. She knows that, um that you think that you talk too much

N- yes.

A- how does she know ? (long pause) is it because she can see or you've told her

N- She can see.

A- Right. Has she ever asked you why you are talking or why you couldn't understand the work ?

N- why I can't understand the work .

A- what do you usually say to her ?

N- Um I usually say that I am stuck.

A- Right. right. and does she usually help you ?

N- Yes.

A- How does she help you ? Say you got stuck with a spelling, how would she help you ?

N- Well well..... I'm not supposed to have help with spellings.

A- (laughs) Right, so how if you can't spell a word how do you find out how to spell it ?

N- We just miss a word.

A- Oh, you just leave the word out ?

N- Yes.

A- Do you come back to it later ?

N- yes.

A- Right, OK. What about then if you were stuck in your science ? What would you do there ?

N- Um I would tell the teacher.

A- you would go and ask the teacher and Ms. Gwinnell would help you ?

N- (nodded)

A- Would she just talk with you

N- She talks with me and then I write it down.

A- right and you find that OK ?

N- Yes.

A- Do you have anybody else who helps you in the classroom ?

N- Um

A- like in this classroom Mrs. Rani works with some of the children and Ms. Dilshad works with some in Year 1. Um does anybody else help you with your work ?

N- Sometimes yes.

A- Who is that ?

N- Sometimes it is Navita Jassi (another pupil in the same class).

A- oh right, one of the other children ?

N- yes.

A- How do they help you, that is kind ?

N- They help me if I am stuck or anything.

A- So you go and ask them ?

N- Yes.

A- Oh right. So who do you ask first if you are stuck ?

N- Ms. Gwinnell.

A- You go and ask Ms. Gwinnell first and if she is busy you go and ask Navita (N. nodded).

That's a good system ! What happens if Navita says I am busy ?

N- Then I've got to think about it in my um

A- Is that when you start to lose your temper a bit ?

N- A bit, yes.

A- OK. Well you seem to have a good system there don't you ? So you get quite a bit of help.

N- yes.

A- But there are no other teachers in school who help you ?

N- Uh-uh.

A- OK. Do you think that your mum and dad know what you find ... that you find it difficult to listen and to concentrate ?

N- Well I haven't told them yet.

A- do you think that they know anyway ?

N- I think so.

A- How do you think they know ? How did they find out ?

N- By, um .. Ms. Gwinnell told them.

A- And have they ever said anything to you about it ?

N- Yes.

A- What have they said ?

N- (laughs) Sometimes they say it back to me that I need a bit more work and that

A- when you say say it back to you what do you mean ?

N- Umum.....

A- what do they do ? (long pause) I don't understand by what you mean by say it back

N- they do the work with me again.

A- Right. Is this at home ?

N- yes.

A- Oh I see, right. So if you get stuck they will help you at home.

N- Yes.

A- So do you get a lot of help with your work at home ?

N- Yes.

A- you do. What sort of things do you do at home ?

N- Normally I read my book and do my homework.

A- Right. What sort of homework ?

N- Um

A- I'm in Reception and we only get reading books in here so what sort of homework do you do with mum and dad at home ?

N- like like I need to learn umeven and

A- Odd ?

N- even and odd yes.

A- is that something that the whole class is doing or just yourself ?

N- No, just me. Because I keep getting stuck on them. Sometimes.

A- so who's idea was that to have special homework to help you ?

N- Well they haven't gave it to me before but I need to learn that.

A- Right, so it's something that you want to learn ?

N- Yes.

A- with the homework that you take home to do with your mum and dad is that something special for you as well ?

N- Yes.

A- so who thought of giving that to you ?

N- Ms. Gwinnell.

A- And do you mind doing that ?

N- Yes. (a little confused here !)

A- Do you like doing it ?

N- Yes.

N- Oh so you do like doing it. It doesn't make you cross that you have your own homework ?

(N. shook head). And do you think that that helps ?

N- Yes. Especially my brother Joshua.

A- How does it help there ?

N- Well his teacher give him some homework but Joshua doesn't like doing it.

A- Right, so he does yours ?

N- No ! He just plays the game that's all !

A- so he doesn't do his homework but you do.

N- No. Yes.

A- OK.

N- I said to my brother have you got any homework ? I made some homework for him, he done it, right, and when his teacher gave him some homework it was in his ... um ... book bag. I saw it, right, and he didn't do it.

A- Right. Do you think that he should do it ?

N- Yes.

A- Why ?

N- Because when he gets up to secondary school the teacher might ask him have you learned anything ?

A- And if he hasn't done the homework he might have to say no I suppose.

N- Yes.

A- So do you get help with your spelling and your writing ?

N- I get help with writing but not spelling.

A- Right. What sort of help do you get with your writing ?

N- Um

A- Is this help that you get at school or at home ?

N- At school.

A so what sort of help do you get with your writing ?

N- Yes.

A- Is it Ms. Gwinnell that helps you with it ?

N- Yes.

A- It is, right. And you don't get any help with your spelling ?

N- No.

A- would you like some help with your spelling ?

N- yes.

A- Yes. How would you like to be helped with your spelling ?

N- Um

A- what would you like people to do to help you ?

N- If I am stuck on a word

A- Yes what would you like them to do ?

N- Um um

A- Would like them to write it down ? Or help you to sound it out

N- Help me to sound it out.

A- so if I remember right you said that you found reading

N- Easy.

A- easy and you said that you could read well because you could sound the words out but you find that difficult with spelling ?

N- Yes. Yes.

A- So if you don't have the letters there you find it more difficult ?

N- Yes um

A- Do you find it difficult to remember all the spellings and things ?

N- Yes.

A- But when you get stuck you ask Ms. Gwinnell

N- I remember when we were doing spellings, the year 6 ones, and I didn't get none of them right.

A- Oh, was this the practice SAT ?

N- Yes.

A- how did that make you feel ?

N- Sad !

A- Sad. You like getting things right don't you

N- Yes.

A- Exactly right. Right. but you didn't lose your temper after that ?

N- No.

A- OK. Do you ever think that you will get good at spelling ?

N- Yes.

A- Yes. What as you get older ?

N- (nodded head).

A- so how do you think that you will get better ?

N- As I get older.

A- Why do you think that getting older will help ?

N- because, um, I can spell things.

A- So you will learn more and remember more and

N- Yes.

A- Yes. OK. Do you like school ?

N- (nodded head) Um.

A- What do you like best about school ?

N- Making masks.

A- You enjoyed that ?

N- Yes.

A- that was really nice, wasn't it ? Beautiful masks !

N- Yes (with enthusiasm)

A- And what don't you like ?

N- Writing !

A- You don't like writing Why is that ?

N- Because when somebody writes something on the board it takes long and long to write it down and it keeps going and going

A- right. Do you mean copying off the board ?

N- Yes.

A- Do you find that difficult as well ?

N- Yes. Difficult to write the letters.

A- And do you have to really concentrate on the spellings as well, I suppose.

N- Yes. I could get the sounds right if I don't know the word

A- but you don't like copying off the board ?

N- No.

A- OK. I think I have asked enough questions haven't I ?

N- Yes.

A- It wasn't as bad as it seemed was it ?

N- No.

A- No. It's been really interesting. Now I've talked to your mum and Ms. Gwinnell and now you. Thank you very much for your help.

N- That's OK.

Note; throughout this interview I felt that I needed to provide a scaffold for Negus to secure his answers around. He generally is monosyllabic and I knew that this might pose a problem. however, I feel that one of the issues here was that he simply didn't have the communication skills to respond to my questions without a supportive framework and multiple choices provided by myself at times. Partly, from his tone, words and body language , i feel this is because he finds finding the words to explain himself difficult. However, i also feel that he was genuinely surprised that he was asked the types of question he was - he hadn't been asked that type of question very often, if at all, before.

Interview with Teacher K about Negus (known as Teacher 1) - July 1998.

The interview took place in K.'s classroom after school one weekday. The time and place had been suggested by K. and was one of a series of interviews carried out concerning children with SEN in her class. I had previously interviewed the mother , but not yet the child himself.

I appear to have missed the first few moments of this interview !

K- and this is how he sees himself ...?

A- um.

K- or my perceptions ?

A- it's your perceptions

K- of Negus.

A- ... of him.

K- right.

A- so if we start with the cards - is that OK ?

K- yes.

A- it just seems to make it easier for people. Do you actually find this easy to use ?

K- yes, oh yes.

A- does it make it easier than just having to think ?

K- no, it's easier because it focuses you on something.

A- that's what I hoped. You must also say if you think that I have missed things.

(during this conversation K sorted the cards into piles - she took 2 or 3 minutes and appeared to consider several cards carefully - mainly social skills).

K- (at the end) I just want to check that I have them in the right pile here. I don't know about singing ...

A- well just put it over there (the OK pile). And keeping your temper ?

K- Um ... he's been working on it. We had a bad day today, this morning.

A- right. So is it something that you feel that he generally finds difficult ?

K- it certainly was. But it's difficultit's difficult to say. He's not a child who strikes out, it's because of frustration.

A- right, OK.

K- so I'm not quite sure where to put it.

A- we can come back to it. So, the things that he finds easy at school are working with other children, playing in the playground, making things.

K- uh-hum.

A- and the things that he finds difficult at school are doing maths, reading, finding out things, understanding what the teacher says, concentrating in class, asking for help, writing , spelling, and science and keeping your temper is somewhere between difficult and OK. So if we look at the ones that he finds easy at school.

K- OK.

A- playing in the playground, working with other children - is he, he finds it easy to work with other children in class ?

K- yes, in this class they are very aware of Negus's needs. In fact they were too aware at some points and would do it all for him. So we had to wean the children off helping him so much but all, all the children in the class are happy to work with him he doesn't cause any problems. Um, and the same in the playground.

A- so do they know what his needs are ?

K- (pause) yes, I think they are very aware of um the fact that he can't read particularly well and he cannot remember instructions and certainly, going back two years, they were doing that for him. Whether they have been trained to do that I don't know or whether they just took it on board because they all like him. He enjoys making things. he particularly likes DT one of the problems that he has, which comes out in DT, is that he likes everything to be just right so he will not spell a word unless he thinks that it is perfect. So making things, everything that he makes he puts together really well.

A- right. So he is a bit of a perfectionist ?

K- extremely ! And obviously that causes problems - the keeping his temper bit comes out of that he just wont have a go and try and write a sentence down and then look at the spellings afterward.

A- has that always been so or

K- yes, yes. Um with the outside agency, I think what she said, I can't remember what she is called

A- Valerie ?

K- Pat. I think her name is Pat. But I can't remember what agency it is. Um, she thinks that it is a question of confidence.

A- right.

K- which I didn't think it was and neither did Mrs Rani (NNEB) or his mum, but as time has gone on we actually think that she was right. So we decided that she probably is an expert after all (both laugh) and we're not.

A- right.

K- but that's not all his problems. But one of them is , about being confident about his ability.

A- right. Does that show in his social behaviour as well or just his work behaviour, that in his work he finds a lack of confidence ?

K- um

A- is he fairly confident with the other children or

K- yes, but they take the lead. they normally take the lead, except in his partnership with Gary well, that's broken up now with the year 4 being out in the morning he tends to be on his own again with his working.

A- can you explain the partnership with Gary please.

K- uh, when I had year 4 in here Gary has also got behaviour problems, extreme behavioural problems, um and learning problems but it just so happened that Gary can remember instructions which Negus can't do. And Negus is very focused on that he wants to do his work so between them Gary would remember what to do and Negus would try to do it and then persuade Gary to do it. But they both came to a cropper when it came to anything like spelling ... because neither of them could spell (both laugh). But somebody else on the table like Sukdip or Surjit would intervene then.

A- and is that something that you have set up ?

K- I tried to set it up, I thought it might work um and it did for a while and then Gary went beyond the barriers of what I wanted him to do how to behave .. um so it broke down for a while and it has completely broken down now because of him now being out in the morning.

A- because he is out of class with Ben in the mornings

K- so Negus tends to work on his own with Miss Morris.

A- right, OK. What support does he get in class ?

K- he gets um, every morning no, Monday to Thursday 9 to 9:30 he goes out with Miss Morris and he does spell checks, a little bit of reading and from Pat, the outside agency, we give him a list of key words ... I give Miss Morris a list of key words um, something to do with what we are doing during the week and she goes through them and talks around them.

A- right.

K- so, for example, we are doing questionnaires this week so I asked her to talk about questions, questionnaires and asking people things and finding out answers um because Pat says that his vocabulary is very limited and he really does not understand words that we expect him, you know we assume rather than he understands. So, it does work because it feeds back sometimes, you know, in this case it was geography but science is another one, trying to explain push pulls and being very specific. Five or six words, no writing - you are not allowed to do any writing around it.

A- so if he has such a limited vocabulary, do you know why he has such a limited

K- I don't , no. I mean it is increasing. Um, Pat has tested him over, tested him over I think it is 2 years, since I have had him and she has seen a huge improvement. Um, one of the other things that he can't do is that he can't rhyme he cannot rhyme words, he cannot see a rhyme. So another, another task from Pat has been to teach him poems - lines of poems so that he can hear the rhymes.

A- right. So can he sounds and things like that ?

K- no.

A- no. That must be a bit of a blow when you are doing spelling !

K- um, and he can't remember them so if you are doing ch, or you think that you have done it a thousand times and he sits down and he wants chips ... ch and he will put sh (laughs).

A- yes, right. So he have an actual medically named problem ? Or is it that he just finds learning difficult generally ? Or has he just got a bad memory or

K- well, as I say, she goes back to this question of confidence , does Pat, um ... plus he has missed out on a huge amount of skills so that is as much as I know I do know that he has got a statement through but I haven't seen it yet.

A- and that will give him support in class ?

K- an integration assistant umbut not the maximum hours, not at all.

A- fifteen being the maximum presumably.

K- yes, I can't remember - I would have to look it up again. I haven't read it yet.

A- you haven't read it yet. And, who will decide what will happen in that time - will you decide as the class teacher or Pat or

K- I presume the class teacher, and perhaps Pat would have some input is what I think should happen. I mean I was very sceptical about what she said at the beginning but it was invaluable (laughs) actually.

A- sure. So does she do all the diagnosis ?

K- yes.

A- side, and testing and assessment ?

K- yes, I'm trying to think of anybody else that has seen him. Ilsa (EP)

A- Ilsa has, the Educational Psychologist.

K- that's for the tape (T laughs). I'm trying to look up here and see if there is anything that she has done with him (her notice board). Yes, do you want me to bring it over ?

A- yes, you can do.

K- so he had to we had to go through this profile here, Mrs. Rani and myself, and try and fill in how much we thought

A- and this provided by Pat ?

K- yes.

A- and these are notes of her visit. How often does she come in ?

K- Ohit think it should be about every 5 weeks how often does this work out ? She does give the times. I don't tend to have anything to do with her when she comes. She'll take him away, or she'll maybe ask Andrea to do the work with him. Sometimes she does it with him when she just checks whoever is working with him is doing what she wants them to do, and basically it is about this not writing down. She is very keen that it is lots and lots of oral work - he has to express himself.

A- so the support that he has in class is really defined by her, or do you choose

K- no, no that half an hour at the beginning is basically whatever Pat's asking for um, classroom support I decide, based on his needs.

A- So you are the person who set up the link with Gary and

K- yes.

A- ... the other children helping him ?

K- yes.

A- but she decides on the 9 to 9:30 ?

K- yes.

A- oh, alright.

K- well, I gave her that slot - whether she thinks it carries on throughout the day I just tell her that it is impossible.

A- so are the things that he finds difficult related to, mainly, to his ability to remember things and write ?

K- yes.

A- (at this point I spread out the difficult pile and put curriculum areas together). So, you have got the main curriculum areas and then you have got some of the more social behaviours.

K- basically he can't do any of the curriculum things without support.

A- right. Why is that ?

K- well, it comes back to this this bit about concentration in class he cannot, he physically cannot listen in a whole class situation, whether he's sat on the carpet or whether

they are sat at their seats. He switches off. I see him go and even if he is sat on the carpet, when everybody is going to go and I ask does everybody understand before you go he will put his hand up and say no.

A- right.

K- so, he is getting better at asking for help, but we still get this business of him being sat there not doing anythingum, he doesn't understand because he cannot listen to more than, I think, 2 instructions.

A- right. With the concentrating if you told him one to one can he understand ?

K- yes, it would be a different explanation to the one I gave to the class - I would simplify it much more but he wouldn't hold it, I would have to come back again, which is why

A- so you have to keep on having to retell

K- yes. which is why if there was someone else there, like Gary, then they would keep reminding him. It's no good writing it down because his reading is not up to it.

A- (laughs gently) he's a bit stuck isn't he ?

K- he is really which is why he gets so frustrated and we get the face and the tears. But, also, he doesn't like work set differently to the rest of the class, I mean it has to happen.

While year 4 were in here he found that he was working with a group of year 4 children and he didn't seem to mind - he knew that he was the only year 5 but he didn't seem to mind. But since he has been back in year 5 he is the extreme and he knows it. And he doesn't like going out - mind I say he doesn't like going out but he prefers it in maths because he's doing odds and evens while the rest of them are doing all sorts of things and he just cannot do

A- right. So, when you say that he doesn't like different work to other children what's the reason for that - does he say what .. why he doesn't like that ?

K- no, he just ... because he is very aware that he can't do it and he gets very cross with himself.

A- and is that why you put keeping your temper

K- yes

A- apart up there ?

K- because I don't know whether you would describe it as temper. I mean it could appear like that - it's extreme frustration I think. Because he appears, I mean I don't know how you can tell this, you get the feeling that he is a bright boy you know, and that it is something that needs to be unlocked as much as anything I mean that's not educational, it's not based on anything except a sort of feeling.

A- yes it's often as good as

K- well

A- lots of tests. Is his mum or dad aware of the needs that he has ?

K- yes. As far as I know both parents ... um I haven't ever spoken to dad about it but mum I always get the impression that mum talks to dad about it. Mum is very aware, yes. And she has been part of the push to get him extra help, she's been there wanting it.

A- do you mean in the statementing process ?

K- well, even before that, even before that - in assessing his needs. As far as I know, this is the impression I get, that she has been very pleased that he has made little bits of progress and she has been very supportive to me and to Mr Lanyon (SENCo) and he been very appreciative towards Negus of anything that he has done and if I have felt that he hasn't tried and she has spoken to him, but not in a horrible way that's going to put him off. She's tried to point it out and he has come back and apologised if he has been rude or whatever. But she has been part, in any group she has asked for help - why hasn't he been statemented or why hasn't it been picked up before in the past whatever I think that she is very aware, she has made herself as aware as she can of the system and how it works.

A- and how has she done that ? has she talked to teachers or ...

K- well, it's no good talking to me because I don't know how the system works but with Mr. Lanyon, he has certainly advised her about how to go about pushing for it, who to speak to. And she has come to the meetings with Pat and she comes at the end of the day to check on him usually.

A- right. Every day ?

K- well, it was. Her work's changed, her working hours have changed, I don't seem to see her. But if she is collecting him then she will make a point of asking how has he been ?

A- and does she support him at home as well ?

K- again, I think it depends on her working hours. She did. When I spoke to her about his reading obviously wasn't moving and he said he hadn't read at home I asked her and she said no she hadn't been able to hear him. So, again, she is aware - I didn't want to make her feel too guilty.

A- yes, sure. If she is working it is very difficult isn't it ?

K-yes.

A- right. And in her understanding of the system and her push to get Negus help does she articulate what she thinks Negus's difficulties are ? Or does she accept what the school says ?

K- well if we go back to the meeting with Pat .. um ... I felt very much like she did that what Pat was saying was a load of rubbish basically, that she was saying that this child was all due to his lack of confidence - I sat there thinking this child is confident. But as it turns out no he is not confident, he's not confident about the words and so, I mean I spoke to her, to Negus's mum about this and said well I have changed my opinion and she said that yes, she thinks that perhaps she was right about some of it I've forgotten the question now (laughs)

A- does she have her own views on why Negus has these needs and what his needs are ?

K- (pause) I don't know, I think she recognises what he needs now but I don't know if she recognised I don't know. I mean, things have been said, but I think she sort of blames things that have happened in the past or didn't happen in the past in his education ..so

A- so she thinks that something that has happened in school is responsible for him

K- yes, there possibly wasn't ... he wasn't picked up early enough or that he wasn't ... he was left to his own devices rather than pushed.

A- so she presumably thinks that maybe his Key Stage 1 education (K starts to smile) - I was his teacher in Reception so

K- yes, she mentioned thatno, no, no, no !

A- I don't mind what you say.

K- no, no, no! I mean that is what she said. As I don't know anything about that I don't want to comment on that really.

A- you are allowed to because I don't mind.

K- no, she didn't say anything about you.

A- in terms of her understanding of the system and Negus - does she understand how your classroom runs ?

K- well, I have tried to explain to her - I try to explain to her on parents evening when she has been in before. How Negus fits in to the whole and that he is set different work at a much lower level. I always try to emphasise when I have told her that if we have had some sort of breakthrough, that it is only a small step because i would hate her to go away with the impression that he has suddenly caught up with the lower level whatever, because that would be very untrue.

A- do you think that she thinks that he is going to catch up ?

K- I suppose any parent would wish that. I don't know how seriously she really thinks it. I try not to build her hopes too high. I'm very keen to tell her the positives but I don't want her to

think that he is suddenly going to catch up. Because my own feeling is that it is too late, that he should have been statemented, and the extra help was needed years ago.

A- yes, sure.

K- and I don't know whether Mark has spoken to her yet about Pat's suggestion that when he gets his secondary school choices that he will go for a special school.

A- right. right. Do you think that his mum and dad will be happy about that ?

K- I don't know - I don't again, I think that any parent would be horrified at the thought of it, or whether she would realise that is what he needs. Then she might change her mind.

A- OK. You used to see mum a lot of times outside, outside the school day do you meet her at any other times - I mean like Parent's evenings is the obvious one ?

K- Parent's Evening yes. If she has, i can't remember if she made it to every one but she certainly came to see his work at another time. She doesn't miss him out - so she is really good.

A- is that a useful time, Parent's Evening ?

K- yes, I mean she is quite happy to talk about him in the room ... um

A- she doesn't find it difficult with other parents being there or no, he is quite good in the sense that it is her child and it doesn't really matter whatever anybody else thinks. I think she is very direct in that because she is supporting him. I haven't ever got the impression that she wants to talk privately because certainly she knows that she could ask me and I would arrange another time. No, she doesn't seem embarrassed, she's not embarrassed by him at all.

A- and you have told her if she wants to she can talk with you at another time ?

K- yes, I think I always say that to her that if she wants to speak see me about anything she only has to come in or send a note or whatever. She doesn't ever send notes, just pops in.

A- OK, I have run out of questions.

K- good (both laugh)

A- thanks very much.

K- you're welcome.

**Interview with Support Staff A. about Negus (known as Support Staff ii)-
February 1999.**

The interview took place after school in my classroom . A was obviously nervous at the beginning - particularly about the use of the microphone. By the end she was more relaxed and said that she enjoyed the process. The interview was the first time that we had talked at any length and this gave an air of unfamiliarity which is different from other staff based interviews.

T- What I am trying to do is look at the way in which support for children who have special needs is set up within the school - mainly the children at stages 1,2 and 3. because once you get to 4 or 5 you tend to have well you have a statement, you have a specialised integration assistant and things

(at this point we were interrupted briefly - this proved a chance to have a laugh and to relax somewhat)

T- so I am looking at the sort of support that they get because obviously they are a new group of children who have never been considered

A- special needs before .

T- usually it would only be children like Leroy or Emmanuel so there is very little written on this area.

A- is that changing though ? I know that that is changing in the majority of schools

T- you mean the stages 1 to 3 ?

A- yes.

T- well all schools have had to do that. All schools will have to have a special needs register from stages 1 to 5. But it is only really the Code of Practice that has brought that about ... I the past they would have been called "slow"

A- yes, that is what I mean ...

T- ... or found things difficult, or even further back the dunces I suppose or something like that. So that is really what I am looking at. What I will do with the interview is that obviously I will record it, I will transcribe it ... I will write it out longhand ... and then use it as part of the sample for the study. I am interviewing 9 different children and their teachers and some support staff and Chris and Ilze Mason, who is the EP. So it will hopefully give a fairly

detailed picture of the school. If I ever come to publish any of it and I use something from this interview then I will come back and ask you for your consent ...

A- it is alright.

T- I will try and find you even if you are not here (both laugh as M.'s employment status in the school is a running joke in the school because of it's uncertainty). But obviously within any writing I wont use your name and if you talk about any particular children I will change that as well. She just has an initial with her name, the teachers will probably have a number, so I will probably give you another number, because you wouldn't want anybody

A- no (laughs, somewhat nervously)

T- like if the Local Authority want to use the study

M- yes, because there are issues of confidentiality as well as my confidences.

T- yes, so whatever you say is completely confidential I don't have to report anything back to Chris ... this is completely outside of school the school doesn't pay for it or anything . Hopefully I wont keep you too long.

M- OK.

T- So can we start with m general question ?

M- yes.

T- can I ask you when you think of the term special educational need or special need what sort of things do you think about ?

M- well, my initial thought is that there is obviously m child who is actually needing some extra assistance within the classroom environment whether it will be through behavioural, learning ... um even m physical problem. So I think that it is basically that there is somewhere in that agenda where they are needing some extra assistance within that classroom environment.

T- and you would say some of the reasons why they might need that

M- .. would be through either behavioural or learning yes learning difficulties, yes.

T- so would you say that those are the 2 main causes ?

M- I would say between learning and behavioural .. yes, definitely.

T- and with those children they usually have individual education plans with them so what would you say the purpose of the plan is ?

M- I would say that the actual purpose of setting up an educational plan is to help assist that child to gain some of the actual curriculum basis that they are probably missing out on in the actual classroom environment because they maybe not because of whatever difficulty

they as having they are not able to attain the targets of what is basically expected from them within the classroom environment. So i think that the IEPs are actually based on trying to actually assist that child either to still gain some of the curriculum information or actually give them an insight into what they could actually be gaining into and give them assistance with it as well so it is extra assistance for themselves and also to help them to gain some of the extra information that they may be lacking from the curriculum due to whatever the difficulties they are having.

T- so would you say the IEP is m sort of skills thing, that you are teaching them skills ... or knowledge ... ?

M- I would say m combination of both it is increasing their skills obviously you are trying to increase their skills because they may be depending on what the difficulty is you may be trying to increase their skills and also on top of that it is also knowledge because they are learning things on top of that as well so I would say that it is m combination of both.

T- and within that IEP what do you see as your role ?

M- I would say my roleum my role would be actually trying to implement the actual ... the areas that they are lacking on um ... so for instance if m child was having learning difficulties in the area of comprehension work or phonological work and the IEP was actually based on actually phonics sounding out the letters and things like that my role would actually be the finding of resources or activities around that area that would help that child to obviously assist them ... as I said again the knowledge and skills

T- so do you have m part in actually writing the IEP ?

M- at the moment, no. As far as I know the SENCO manager or co-ordinator I should say, or the classroom teacher has the involvement and sometimes ... here I haven't actually been added into that grouping but where I was previously me and the SENCO manager would actually sit down together and she would state to me how has so and so done this term period and what do I fee needs to be blah, blah, blah and then we'd ... you know, obviously she would do most of it but we would implement it together ... but I would be able to tell that I had done this and I had done that but I think that we could do m bit more so she would try and work it in around something that is missing on her and we would work together on that. So before hand I have but now it is more the SENCO manager and the class teacher.

T- so your job here is to implement things ?

M- yes.

T- do you actually plan the activities for the child ?

M- there are some guidelines ... advice has been given there are guidelines as to you could use this or you could use that but the majority of the time it is like OK, I am basing myself on phonics so i need to go and find resources as to .. or maybe CVC letters so therefore I have been told, you know, can you teach the child more CVC blah , blah, blah and I will go and find the resources in that sense, yes. It is a lot of ... it is half and half i suppose

T- do you find what you do here as effective as you did at the previous

M- yes I can't say more effective ... I have more of a role here . At my previous place it was a different role anyway. I am a learning support here and I was an integration so the child had a statement and the child had actually been given the basis of this child has to have an integration assistant. So that was a different role altogether. And there it was just mainly the one child that I worked with in one class and I supported other children within the class who hadn't been statemented yet, that were probably a stage 2 or a stage 3. So it was a different situation there where I was just basically supporting on the side and working on the integration of one child.

T- and that was the IEP that you helped plan ... with that one child ?

M- yes. But here it is it is more of a wide range of supporting different children in different classes ... I am everywhere (laughs). It is more like supporting a wider range of children that haven't got to stage 5, they are actually on stages 2 or 3, and until the authority actually says yes I am there just supporting them on whatever needs are written on that IEP. I think that I have more here ... it is more of a challenge

T- because you have more children ?

M- yes. it is more of a challenge here. And obviously the hours are different here as well, because I was doing part time at my previous school whereas I am doing full time here so it is more of a challenge you know, it gives you a kickstart.

T- why do you think that staff here don't involve you in the planning of the IEPs ?

M- I don't know ... because as far as I was aware Mark actually did the IEPs in co-ordination with the class teacher and then there was a period where he was trying to get the class teachers to do the IEPs on their own and then the support then obviously would have worked alongside the class teacher. But that seems to have faded out, I haven't heard anything about it since and I realise .. i think Mark is actually still doing the IEPs, I am not actually 100% sure on that. So I just presume that it is actually Mark and the class teacher that are actually

working together on the IEPs and then obviously if I feel concerned about something that I am doing with the child then I mention it to the teacher . Then on that case they will go and speak to Mark. So that is how I have actually seen that it worked here, I am not quite sure if that is the actual you know.

T- so when do you feed back to Mark or the class teacher ?

M- right. I always feed back to the class teacher. usually after every session that I have done I always say, well, this is what we have done today, this is how I feel. If I am really concerned I always do, I always get back to the class teacher with m report. Between Cathy, Gill and July ... Cathy I always say that this is what I have done today and if I am concerned, which I have been about Reece, I have said to her and then between Cathy and Mark they have liased and then Mark will speak to me on whatever decisions he has decided to make. With Gill, me and Gill just communicate if I have m problem and then she hands me work to do if I am not doing the actual work that I have prepared myself. And then we discuss what I have actually done or , if she has given me work. I will say well I wasn't too happy with how blah, blah, blah worked on this work because they seemed to be struggling and then we go through another method. Or she will say, alright I will think of something else and I will get back to you and we converse that way. With July, because of the majority of the time I am in July's class anyway (we laugh) we work together on that and if I am concerned I will say, oh I don't think that that is right and I am going to try something else or I have got all this work, what do you think is more suitable.

T- and they give you the freedom to change things ?

M- yes, yes.

T- so when do you do that feedback ? Do you do it at the end of m lesson ?

M- it is usually just at the end of the lesson, unless I have had the child during the morning and then it is usually morning until dinnertime break so just at dinnertime break. Then I will say that so and so did fine on that, there was no problem blah, blah, blah and we are going to move onto so and so. Or if I felt that they had m problem, so it is usually just as I finish that session, like it is usually dinnertime so whoever's class i am in, apart from Cathy's, so I usually converse with people just at dinnertime.

T- and do you have any part in the review of the IEP ?

M- no.

T- so your feedback is the thing, and then the teacher decides. I must admit at my other school I did do reviews, I did attend the reviews ... um ... but again as I said those were

children who had actually been statemented and obviously as i am the integration assistant appointed by Education and reviews of things like the EP are coming in it was m point of me having to be there anyway. But as I have come here there I mean I have more of m workload but for things like the reviews I am not inputted as much as I was at my other school. But I don't know whether that is just the way that Boulton works or you know, I don't know.

T- So ... you work with the child and you plan that work and then you report back to the teacher and they do the review.

M- yes.

T- and do you have any contact with the parents ?

M- no. What I do sometimes for instance, I have worked with who can I use as an example ? Tracy and she is supported by me but she hasn't been statemented so I support her in the classroom and what I was doing then ... at that time it was like decoding and I would give her homework as well independently ...

T- oh, right.

M- ... and obviously I would speak to her mum because that is just my nature and I would say that I have give Tracy this and blah, blah, blah and I have asked her to and I would converse with her there. When I was working with Negus I used to speak with Negus's mum, saying that basically telling her how I felt that he was getting on. She would come to me and say well how is he doing ? Well, I would say, Negus has been fine blah, blah, blah or whether he has had m bad day or m good day and she would ask me what I had been doing ... spellings or homework ... things like that. So there is the occasion where I have done, more so last term that this term.

T- is that because you have got different children ?

M- yes, different children.

T- is that because you have got different classes or just different children.

M- it's just basically different children. I'm not supporting Tracy so much now ... I am still in the same class but I am not supporting her so much now I am more supporting Leroy. So, and at the moment, with Leroy's work ... with what I am doing with Leroy at the moment there is no reason for me to actually talk to his mum because I am not sending any homework home at the moment or things like that. But with children that I have sent homework with, or ... I mean I don't think it is my duty so say if the children have been misbehaving in the classroom .. that is the teacher's job definitely ...

T - that would be m nice job for you ! (both laugh)

M- so I don't think ... that's not my area. Obviously if it come s to work that I am doing with them within the school and I am sending homework with them ... especially if I am sending homework I think that's yes I need to say this is what I am doing and can you make sure blah, blah, blah and remember to bring it back in.

T- so that is mainly an explaining role of what you want them to do and giving feedback on how they have done.

M- yes, yes.

T- do you talk with them about their general progress within the class ?

M- no, no.

T- so it is specifically on the homework.

M- yes. As for how they are getting on in the classroom I don't know whether that is July's role, Mark's role or is it my role ? Because that hasn't actually been stated to me either. So I just automatically presume with m child how their achievement and their standard I think that that is really the class teacher's role or Mark's as he is the actual SENCO co-ordinator. So unless it is actually said to me well, can you I wouldn't like to presume that that was my actual role.

T- so am I right ... does your role actually vary from teacher to teacher ? In the extent of what you do or is it something that Mark has said, this is your role in the school ?

M- nobody has ever given me m full statement of my role (laughter together). Can you believe that ? Yes ?

T- yes I can. I have never seen my job description.

M- OK. I mean. I have my job description so ... I've got that but nobody has actually said this is where you

T- you don't know where it begins or ends.

M- yes. So I muddle in and I do bits and bits of everything unless someone says to me does it vary within classes ?

T- yes , that is what I was wondering.

M- Julyum ... July's yes because I support quite m few children in there. There is about 3 or 4 that I support in there. But on top of that I obviously help the other children as you do as you go on and you help them. In that area, July's is different. Gill's because I actually take children out of the class ... withdraw them from the classroom and I actually do group activities on my own in m different area with them. So yes, and the same with Cathy ... yes

the same with Cathy. I actually withdraw from the classroom and I do partially Cathy's activities and partially my activities in the time that I actually have them out. And basically the same with Gill. So I would say that Gill and Cathy's are more or less the same, but July's is different because I support quite a few of the children within the classroom and I don't actually withdraw any from the class.

T- so ... with Gill and Cathy did you decide to withdraw them or were you asked to withdraw them ... or ...

M- no, it was a combination of both and, like I said, because this term now I am working with different children again ... last term it was a combination of some children work better within the class, some of them are better to be taken out because of distractions of other children and things like that ... some children just can't work with all that distraction ... especially Toyana .. when I started working with Toyana obviously working with her in that environment she wouldn't talk at first so we used the quiet area where we could actually point things out I could talk to her and ask her to gesture for me because she wouldn't speak. But then obviously when she started talking we then still kept to the quiet area because we don't know how confident she will be. And we have just continued with that now .. we bring Sufiya out, hoping that Toyana will help Sufiya in some way, you know motivate Sufiya. So I view that as a yes.

T- so it is mainly based on distraction and need ?

M- yes, yes.

T- OK. I am sure that there is something else about that that I have forgotten at this moment ! OK. I'll just go on to another question . Can you tell me something about the training that you have had ?

M- OK. First of all in 1994 I did the national BTEC Diploma in Child Care. So I studied for two years at Joseph Chamberlain College. It included obviously course work and placements. Yes, placements as well at different schools.

T- so you are a qualified Nursery Nurse ?

M- yes. It is the equivalent to the NNEB.

M- have you had any specialist training for the special needs side of your job ?

M- no, apart from obviously when I started my because what happened I actually qualified while I was qualifying I was actually doing a crèche at one of the schools near to the college and a position came up for an integration assistant and I got the position. So my training comes from there ... I haven't actually had any other training apart from when I

actually took that position. And that was the part that actually opened me up into special educational needs within schools and working actually with children that have learning difficulties within schools. And I have always said that I want to channel that area because my son had special educational need and they weren't picked up and he had a lot of difficulties and I always ... I still get a bit upset about it now because knowing what I know now there was so much that could have been done for him that wasn't ... so I think, with having that experience and that position coming up I then stated yes I need to try and get into special needs and work with children who have special educational need. Just to be another supporter, giving them help. And it was more of a personal issue as well so when they offered me the position I was chuffed and that was my main experience there.

T- so when you come across a Negus or a Leroy you haven't been on any special training for them ?

M- no.

T- so do you feel that you have a good understanding of their needs ?

M- um to be honest I wouldn't say 100% knowledge, because there is always things that you can learn there are always new things that you need to know

T- but you feel that you have ...

M- I have picked up a lot as I have gone on. I mean, I have always said that I don't know what is happening at the end of next year ... um I would like to do a course in special educational needs. I have also said that I would ... I don't know what courses you need to go on but actually be a visiting ... you know, from the school services I mean, I would love to get in further into it ... love to ... so I wouldn't say that I have 100 % knowledge.

T- OK. I have remembered the question that I wanted to ask you. It was about the children. How do the children react to you do they recognise that you are there to help children with special needs ?

M- I don't think that they think of me in that status to be honest ... that I am there to help children who have special needs. I think they see me there as someone there just to help them.

T- to help everybody ?

M- yes, to help everybody within that classroom. I mean I don't think that they think that I am there just because someone has got an extra need within the classroom. Because I haven't had that statement said to me. I mean, they know that I am here to help and to help them further

themselves but I have never heard anyone ... so I don't think that they think of me in that light.

T- and would you include the children that you take out in that light as well ... because obviously if you take someone out ...

M- I think it is them I think they just see it as support , as help. I don't think they see it as because they have got ... I mean, because you don't know how children would take to that and I know for a fact that that was one of the problems that my son had he didn't want anyone to think that he had this label. I haven't heard any of the other children here, especially when it comes to taking Reise and Lisa out in the morning, because I take them out every morning, I haven't heard any of the children comment about that and they haven't made that statement to me either. And the same within the other classes as well.

T- So what do Reise and Lisa actually think when you take them out ?

M- I think that they think that I am giving them extra help. I don't think that they see it as special help. They haven't used that term to me and I haven't used that term to them.

T- well, unless they have actually heard it they wouldn't. Do they look forward to coming out with you ?

M- I mean, I think so. I haven't had any groans or no I don't want to go and things like that. And they work well and I haven't had any rejection to say no I don't want to go out there (note : is this likely in view of the desire to please in younger children ? Nobody has asked, they just presume because there is no protest) Negus, when I had Negus, when he went through periods when he was full of the joys of spring and others do I have to ... I think he, I think anybody out of the question that you have just asked, I think that Negus would be the one. Because he would say to me can I stay in the class sometimes, can you work with me in the class ? And me and Karen, because I had m discussion with Karen because I was concerned about it, and she said well, and Pat, and they said well in that case we will compromise you know, two days in and three days out whatever and he was happy with that. So I think out of all of the children it was Negus who had that little stigma about it.

T- and why do you think that Negus was different ?

M- I have been told that Negus, because I thought God I had just started here and I thought is it me and Karen said that he does go into these strops sometimes, he does come in and not want to do anything. So she said not to take it personally and I think that he has had m couple of times in Mark's class when he doesn't want to ... I was told that it was that sometimes he doesn't want to come out of the class, that he wants to stay in and work within the classroom

environment . So that is why we came up with that compromise, but out is of all children Negus is the only one.

T- and was that something that you and Karen decided with Pat, or was it something that you decided with Negus ?

M- no, well, I did say to Negus before I discuss this with Karen and Pat, well I can't make the decision, we will have to talk to Ms. Gwinnell about it because at the moment I have been told that I need to bring you out of class because the environment that we work in is too noisy and we can work together better, and Negus is quite softly spoken. And especially with Rodari and Elliot in the class then , it would have been easier for me to take him out and work with him outside.

T- so you acted as an intermediary for him ?

M- yes, I said to him first and Karen said, well I think that Pat was due in m few days, and we talked to Pat about it as well and we decided to have m compromise. I said suppose we were able to do part in and part out, it is better than nothing and then we talked about it with Pat and Karen and we decided to do it that way. And even then , sometimes he was still OK to come out and I would say well are we going out today and he would come out. So I wouldn't automatically go in and say we are staying in here today I would say are we going in or are we going out ?

T- so he would have some control over it ?

M- yes, I would give him that decision. And he would still say we will go outside so I gave him that choice.

T- so ... following on with that. Do you see that you have a different role or a different relationship with the children than the classroom teacher ?

M- um yes and no um I try m lot not to I would like them to be obviously friendly with me and acceptable of what I say but , at the same time, I don't want to be I don't want to overstep the teacher's mark and I don't want them to think that me and the class teacher are actually how can I put it now

T- you don't want to undermine

M- yes, exactly ... I don't want to undermine and I don't want them to think that either. So ... it is difficult, it is difficult sometimes because sometimes, especially in Julie's class, they do ... because they have had me for last year and they have got me again this year they obviously feel quite comfortable with me and it will be Ms. Morris, Ms. Morris and I will say no wait for Ms. Naguib and Ms. Naguib has s aid blah blah blah and I have to be really firm and

say well so in that class i really do try not to because i really don't want them to think I try to keep them settled and try to say no I am here to support you and I'm not here to you know , there is m line to be drawn. In Gill's class ... Gill's class are fine. They know that Gill is in charge and that is it (both laugh - M. loudly). I still get Ms. Morris can I and I say no Ms. Rose has said blah and I am working with this group and that's it. Cathy's group ... well because I am not in there m lot now ... there are m lot of withdrawals recently ... especially the last term just after Christmas. But prior to that, even then I just had the one group and it wasn't so bad in there either. But I Julie's class they are quite ... they had had me for almost a year anyway and they feel m bit more confident with me

T- because in Negus's case you have given him quite a lot of power haven't you ? By being willing to act as that intermediary

M- I think you need to, other wise the child feels that the child hasn't got any control over anything at all

T- yes. Do you see that as part of your role with the children that you do take out like Negus ?

M- to have some control yes. I think within the classroom obviously they are asked to do a certain thing and they know that they have got to do it in that form. Alright, I am taking them out of that environment and they still have to do to m certain degree what I have asked them to do but at least they probably don't feel intimidated by the other group members or I think that is important.

T- right. Do you ever negotiate the work with them ?

M- yes, I suppose I do in a way because I have worksheets about whatever and I will say we need to do so and so ... well, which one shall we do today ? Shall we carry on with our sounding of our letters from the alphabet. Should we go into CVCs or .. you know. So I do do that sometimes, I have to admit not a lot not as much as I probably could do. Because I know that if I have got m group I start planing and think that I have got to do so and so and I may have m couple of worksheets and I will say well that one is that and this one is this .. now which one should we do ? But the majority of the time I have just got work planned out and I think well we have got to do this today.

T- and do you feel that when you do give them the choice it makes any difference to their attitude ? The way that they work or they learn ?

M- I suppose that it does in general but I haven't from what I have seen I wouldn't say that it has made that great a difference not that great m difference, no. Because I think

sometimes even if they have chosen what they want to do they may not put as much effort into it.

T- so it doesn't give them the motivation

M- yes, the motivation

T- and even though you are giving them this choice presumably you are keeping within

M- oh yes, it is always within the work set by the teacher .

T- so you don't negotiate the IEP with them ?

M- no, it has to be I mean Amardeep in Gill's ... his is letter soundings ... that is part of what Gill wants me to do with him and today was m fine example .. I had two worksheets and he had to sound the letters out , circle one lot and shade the other .. and I asked him which one he would like to do and he actually did the one that he ringed first. And he was fine doing that and when he got onto the second sheet he was fine doing that. So I think ... so the balance is there

T and within Thumbs Up group is your role very similar ?

M- it's similar it is the same thing Mark has worked along with the class teacher to see what the concerns are what the main concerns are that they need to come out then obviously they initiate together what they feel that they can do during that period ... depending on what session they are actually missing during Thumbs Up ... and then whoever has whatever child and then we have to follow the guide

T- so your job a gain is to implement what has been written....

M- like the IEP, yes. So, what I do then is I go to the class teachers ... for instance I have Marcus, Elliot and Precious (both laugh knowing the characters involved). (M goes on to explain what each are doing - it is quite academic). For Marcus, I see Christina ... Christina has actually told me what she wants me to do and I am working towards it.

T- OK. Last question do you think that if your role was different you would be more effective ? And if so, how would you want to change it ?

M- different ... in what way ?

T- I don't know ... say if you had more input into planning the IEP

M- I think that that would be the only area at the moment obviously the class teacher has the child in their class during the hours that they are in there and it is a group session and they are able to see that the child is not able to keep up with that group on certain parts of their work, but when I take them out I can see m stronger view because I have got them on m one to one as to actually what they are capable of doing and there are times when I think, you

know, I could have said well so and so really need to do blah blah blah but I don't know how far within my rights I can go and say well I think that so and so needs blah blah blah um ... because they are just not coping with whatever you are giving me to take out with them to do and we need to go down another scale because they are not coping with that and we need to move down to another scale (from the tone of voice and body language you could tell that M. felt passionately about this). So I think on instances like that yes

T- is that because you are unsure how the member of staff will react ?

M- um

T- or are you unsure about what

M- what my role is both both. Definitely both, because I don't know where the member of staff will feel oh that is not your duty, that is not your role ... um ... obviously they have the child in the classroom, they can obviously see what is going on there as well and then on top of that because, as you said, because of my role.

T- so do you feel an equal member of what you are doing ?

M- I would say that I am equal to a degree. I would say that I am equal. I think on that little snippet there, especially if I do feel that I am concerned because obviously what has been implemented, either on the IEP or whatever the class teacher has asked to be done, I feel that the child just can't cope with it and probably, maybe needs to move down one level to see if they can cope with that.

T- so do you, and I am pushing it bit here, do you feel a lack of trust or

M- no, I wouldn't say a lack of trust.

T- you are just not sure how they are going to react in terms of your role ?

M- yes I wouldn't say lack of trust.

T- OK. Thank you. Shall we stop there ?

M- is that it yes.

We then talked about the interview and there are some interesting comments about reaction to the tape etc.

**Interview with Support Staff J. about Negus (known as Support Staff iii)
- April 1999.**

The interview took place in my classroom over a lunchtime. Jill was typically apprehensive to begin with but gradually settled down and became more open. There was no sense of rush about the interview and little mention was made of the fact that Jill had previously worked with me.

T- firstly, can we begin by me asking you what your role is in school ? or with Negus ?

J- um my role is to support Negus and to sort of fill in gaps that he's missing so that he can do the work in class later on.

T- right ... do you support him daily ?

J- I support him daily but I work on my ... I work one to one with him outside the classroom.

T- right ... so just Negus ?

J- just Negus. I don't tend to work in groups or anything like that.

T- and do you always work outside of the classroom ?

J- yes, because he prefers it really. It just seems to have evolved that way. At first I started working in the class doing maths with him and then we decided that he was more comfortable coming out

T- right ... OK and that's something that he decided for himself ?

J- yes, I sort of followed his lead. It was what he liked and he was more comfortable with that really.

T- right and what sort of work do you do with him ?

J- I work basically from an IEP ... I forgot for a moment, my brain totally went

T - that's OK

J- so I do bits of maths ... I do number bonds working through the Abacus support book ... so we are doing number bonds to ten which he is having a lot of trouble getting. So I do a bit of that every day. Then I try to extend it to do other things as well but i don't think that he is enjoying it because he isn't getting any of it right. I do a bit of writing now, just to build up his confidence. A bit of reading and the interesting bit is that we do tutoring ... pre-tutoring so that when he does science he has an idea what he is going to do in science. So we do the

words and we actually do little mini-lessons before he goes in so that he knows what the lesson is about, he knows all the terms and things ... and that is good anyway.

T- right ... I always wondered what the science that you were doing with him was so you are actually preparing him for the lesson that is going to come up later ...

J- yes, so that he can give something to that lesson himself and take part in the lesson.

T- and you work with him each day ... how long do you work with him for ?

J- two hours, but we have a breaktime and on Thursday his Literacy Hour is at the wrong time so I have an extra half an hour then.

T- so .. he is out of class each morning

J- yes. After the first half hour of the Literacy Hour.

T- so he is there for that and then he comes out and does the number bonds with you. So are you doing all his maths with him ?

J- yes, I suppose so I think that he has maths on a Wednesday afternoon as well but I do the main part of the maths.

T- and in terms of the work that you are doing with him, who planned that ?

J- um Mark sort of put together the programme but I think it through daily and I respond to I am quite laid back about it as well so I respond to what I feel that the needs or what he got stuck on and things like that and his writing as well .

T- so you are free to improvise

J- I am very free to improvise .. yes.

T- when you write the IEP ...

J- I don't write the IEP ... Mark (the class teacher - Teacher L.) writes the IEP ..

T- that's what I was going to ask you do you sit down and do it together ?

J- we have done when I worked with Johnny, I did that ... I sort of came up with lots of ideas and that for what he needed and things ... and where we were as well ... because sometimes you struggle on things anyway and if you are getting bored with something, just change it so see how it goes

T- so Mark does all the planning for the writing side

J- he does all the planning, yes. This year because we haven't done that ... I suppose we shouldn't for an IEP... but we just had a discussion about what we felt that he needed ... but it was very informal.

T- so how do you feedback to Mark about how Negus is doing ? Because if he is out of class presumably Mark doesn't actually see how he is doing or whatever.

J- um only now and again ... not very much actually ... and I am sort of left (there was a tone of despair here - as if we had touched a raw nerve) . That's the way that it feels anyway (J laughs).

T- right how does Mark know how to plan the next one ?

J- um I don't know if I have got any worries or anything I will talk to him. And with the pre-tutoring I will ask him what he is doing and what he expects to do ... I will ask him in that ... so I think he just feels OK about letting me ... because it is just ploughing through very much similar things. So he knows that if I have got any problems, if I am worried about something he knows that I will go to him you know ... and I will ask him about things like what level reading book he should be on. It happens when it is needed really. It is not formal as such

T- does it also not happen because of time or

J- it would yes .. yes, it is

T- it's a time thing is it

J - and you don't always need to see somebody if there is nothing wrong.

T- do you have any part in Negus's reviews or anything like that ?

J- I've not been to a review I've only been working with him since September so he has not had one. I did with Johnny and went to a big one with Johnny.

T- so would you expect to be part of a review ?

J- yes, yes. I would expect so, yes (laughs ironically I felt at the time). I presume yes.

T- right how do you think that Negus feels about being taken out of class ? He chooses to be taken out ... because in the past, from what I understand he has had an issue about being taken out of class.

J- yes yes. Because it is quite, sort of, stigmatising being taken out ...

T- that's what I was wondering ...

J- yes.

T- and yet it is something that he actively chooses

J- I think that he prefers it because nobody can see what he is doing. He doesn't like doing just, sort of , spellings ... he doesn't like doing those in class which he is supposed to he prefers doing them in secret

T- right ... so no-one else can see the level

J- yes. He is very self-conscious about the level that he is at and that's his main problem is confidence, I think. He could do a lot more if

T- so I suppose in a way he is going out to stop the teasing

J- I imagine probably, yes. he is just very conscious that he doesn't know .. that he's not at the same place as the other children. Or he thinks he isn't ... I am sure that he is in some aspects.

T- right ... because that is the other way round from the way that he has been in the past.

Sometimes in the past he has wanted to stay in and going out

J- right ... well I didn't really know him then .

T- no.

J- so as he has grown up he has decided ...

T- it's not a criticism of you

J- oh no, no.

T- it is just interesting to listen to hear people talk about him here. He has obviously had a change in tactic.

J- yes, a change of idea. And I think that he is quite comfortable as well. We try and keep it light and it is about getting his confidence going really.

T- within the sessions that you do ... you say that does he get much freedom about what you are actually doing ? Or how you do it or or is it very much you saying this is what we are going to do today ?

J- well um, well we have got a set timetable that we are supposed to keep to ... we don't always (from the tone and laugh I suspect this is more seldom that J wants to let on)

...we can't keep doing all those things all the time . So we are supposed to keep to this

timetable I sort of let him choose books. i get a handful of books and in his writing he can choose what he writes about. And if he enjoys something we do a lot ... we do a lot of the games that he enjoys. But we have just got the timetable to follow every day.

T- So he wouldn't be able to say this is something that I don't want to do today can we do

J- well he did ask today to play a number game and we did.

T- so he has some control over

J- well..... yes ... a bit yes. Yes, I think so because it all just flows togetheryes

T- right I suppose because you are not in class this doesn't really apply ... but how do you think that the other children in class see you and what you do. because you are presumably there for the first part of the Literacy Hour.

J- well, no. I am not employed then. So I feel quite an outsider and I only began to feel more of the class when Negus was away. And then they used me quite a bit the children. I am only in the class for IT and then I try and help the children.

T- so do you think that the children are even aware that you work with Negus ?

J- well they are ... they must know.

T- do you go and collect him in the morning ?

J- I just try and get him to come straight to me I just go to the door at the end of the Literacy Hour.

T- right and how much training have you had ?

J- um I had that course .. Special Needs what's it called I have forgotten the name of it. Um ... Special Needs assistant course, something like that ... I can't remember the actual specific title. And that was a six months course one day a week.

T- and did you find that helpful ?

J- oh, it was very helpful because I was working with Johnny then so I was trying lots of things out that I was learning ... setting an objective with the children and observation charts which I used and got Johnny writing. But I find it very good looking from the child's point of view. Looking into issues of empathising with them and then enabling them and working with Johnny to find out how he was feeling and why he was acting and I found that

T- is that why things flow a little bit ?

J- it's so they have got control of their situation and looking at the special needs child in the classroom and recognising that they are stigmatised because they think that they can't do anything . And then they end up being sent out and end up feeling a lot different from the other children. because we let Johnny, because at the time he wanted to work in the class we let him do that so that he had control of his own situation. It just seems so obvious and then when it comes to you you just think oh I mean I had never really thought what Johnny ... I must have thought a bit but not as significant as that and why he was so aggressive ... because he was scared stiff

T- um ... yes, with most children they have very little control over

J- yes and that affects their confidence. It is just the way to build the confidence.

T- and you see that as the key to helping children like Negus ?

J- yes, building up their confidence would be the main they need to build up their self-esteem and feel good about themselves. Another thing that I am always worried about is

why we always teach them things and with some special needs I think that you have to teach them more life skills so that when they leave school ... so like the maths so when they leave school they can survive rather than just learn long division ... just because you do it in the National Curriculum. I find that quite odd, you know.

T- even at this level of 10 and 11 ?

J- you're thinking, would that be useful, why do they need these skills. Others might be better, i think.

T- so that is a sort of cutting your losses type thing

J- I suppose it isyes but it's just that you have only got so much time to, you know for the children t learn things as well

T- yes particularly if they find it painfully slow to learn.

J- um I suppose it is more of a secondary school thing.

T- yes ... could be ... mind they are almost at a secondary school level now anyway ...

J- they are, yes.

(we then had a brief chat about ex-pupils who are now at secondary school and how they are faring)

T- so would you say that confidence, or lack of confidence, is the most significant cause for special needs ? Or would you say that there are other things ?

J- I think that confidence id the main problem yes because they have had to struggle sometimes and have seen others doing things that they couldn't yes

T- so have I got this right ... you are saying that children with special needs have often found something difficult and they have had to struggle and they have lost confidence and then they basically stop doing anything is that what you are saying or

J- um I don't think that they consciously stop doing anything it is just because they haven't got the confidence in themselves. I think that confidence is a trick of the mind, you knew and when you have got confidence you can do a lot of things. But when your confidence goes you can't do anything. I can see it day to day with Negus, if he is feeling good in himself and he has got confidence then he can do things but other days, when he is feeling doubtful, he can't do the sort of things he can normally do and that's the trick, I think, isn't it ?

T- does the IEP address that at all ?

J- I think that it does, yes. Building confidence and getting the language sorted are the main things with Negus ... is getting the language.

T- because often the IEPs are they will be able to write 20 words

J- yes, they are often very mechanistic things aren't they ?

T- um do you want to stop there so that you can get some lunch ?

J- I am going home .. finished for the day now .

T- of course. Thank you. That was really interesting.

Appendix 2 - Interview transcripts for the Maryam grouping of relationships (known as Devi in the body of the text).

Interview with Maryam's mother - Ms. M. (known as Parent D)

- 12 \ 12 \ 98.

The interview took place in the library towards the end of the school day. Ms. M. was anxious that the interview ended in time for her to collect her children at the usual time. This allowed some 40 minutes for the interview. Ms. M. was a little anxious to begin with, but soon relaxed and answered confidently. She obviously wanted me to see her as a good parent but i was a little surprised how open she was given that we had not met before (except to arrange consent etc.).

T - Can I start by asking you a couple of questions about yourself ? Just some very general things to help the interview.

M - Right.

T - Were you born in this country ?

M - Yes.

T - Right. And were your parents born in this country ?

M - No.

T - Where were they born ?

M - Pakistan.

T - In Pakistan.....right.....so you went to school in this country ?

M - I was born here. My dad came over here when he was about 20.

T - Right.

M - So he has been here since.

T - Right...

M - So that's how long he's been here. And now he's 61.

T - Right....so a long, long time.....

M- A long ,long timeyes.

T - So did you go to school in Handsworth ?

M - No. I'm from South Yorkshire I am.

T - Right....

M - Not from Birmingham. When we got married we came to Birmingham. We've been here for 9 years now.

T - Right. And did you enjoy school ?

M - Yes....never used to miss a day

T - A real keeny.....

M - I found it that good...they were the best days I had.

T - What did you particularly like about it ?

M - I don't know. I used to like the school.....andwork and friends....

T - Right.

M - Well... like us Asians can't really go out after school and things like that.....

T - Right.

M - So we used to find it really good mixing in with friends.....working...and learning together. PE...I used to love PE.....gymnastics.

T - Right....so your social life as well was school.

M - Yes that's it. It was really different.

T - How did you find that you were treated at school ?

M - I thought I was treated really well although where we were from down South Yorkshire there's only Muslims, there are no Sikhs, no Hindus, no Jamaicans, nobody whatsoever. So when we came here everything was different.....

T - yes.....

M - Because we got used to, you know, people...music on the roads...down where we come from it's very quiet...

T - Right....

M - There's only English and Muslims. And you know, all the schools were just full of English people and a few Muslims scattered around like.

T - So there were very few Muslims in each.....

M - there wasn't that many few. I can't say that there was that many few.

T - Right.....

M - But we got treated very well even though people used to say racist things and all that but it was really good. No, I think the school days were the best.

T - Right.....

M - But now it's terrible (laughs).....

T - It's different....

M - Yes, it's different now.....

T - Do you think that's because it's Handsworth ?

M - I don't know. You know the Jamaicans and that.....you know, they're really offensive. we go into the shops and if you accidentally knock them...you know, they don't leave you alone.

T - Right, yes.....

M - So it's really different from where we come from. Otherwise I like it, I like it a lot here than where my mum and dad come from. You know.....

T - OK...thanks. Rightin terms of Maryam what I thought we could do isas I said I am interested in what you think she finds easy at school and what you think she finds difficult.....

M - Easy is a big word for Maryam.

T - (laughs). So what I have done is i have written down lots and lots of things she does in school. Some of them are subjects like maths or science....

M - Um....

T - Some of them are ...things like concentrating in class, listening to the teacher...

M - She's quite good at that one...concentratingshe concentrates but then again she lacks it as well....(laughs)

T (laughs) Right. So... could you sort through those for me and put the ones you think she would find difficult there...

M - Right.

T - And the ones that you think she would find easy there and the ones you are not sure about there. Is that OK ?

M - That's good. I can see what you mean. Maths.....she is doing really well with her maths. I've seen her doing times by tables...she been doing all her learning about times...I thought she was doing quite well...where she just needs a lot of push.....

T - Right.

M- When she does her work....if she finds....if I say oh Maryam just hold on a minute I'm just doing this job and I'll come and tell you what else to do next.... I even went into town to WH Smiths..... I bought her some of those books.....

T - Oh yes.....

M - You know the learning ones...

T - Yes.

M - But when I tell her to do it, it's like if she finds it a bit difficult she doesn't want to know.

T - Right... so she just gives up or....

M - She just gives up really quickly yes, she does.....where Usman, he's totally different to Maryam.....

T - he sticks at it....

M- Yes he does. he tries his best and he tries his best so much. And then I like praise him when he has done it. I do it to Maryam as well but Maryam just goes oooooooooohhhh....

T - (laughs)

M - She's like that. She's totally different at school from what she is at home...

T - Right, yes.....

M - She makes so much noise at home. You would not believe that but she does. And the boy he's alright as well but.....you know.... so.....

T - Do you think that she finds maths difficult at school ? Or easier ?

M - It's difficult and easy at the same time. So...where do I put it ?

T - Right. Well if she finds something difficult then pop it in there.

M - Right (places card). Science. I don't know....she....science...she was telling me she was doing something about light or something....

T - yes....

M - Creating something.

T - Right, yes...they are doing about light and sound.....

M - Yes.....sound yes....when she heard this noise and I mentioned it vibrates she went I know what that means...

T - that's good !

M - So I ...like... she told me about what she did and everything...

everyday when they.....when they both started school I used to ask them what you did.... did anybody hit you.....you know I asked them so they can give me an answer. Sometimes they said I don't want to tell you what I did today....you know... they don't like it if I say every single day...

T - Right.

M - Where Usman will....he will tell me... and he be's really happy and everything but science...I don't know...I'll put it for easy.

T - OK.

M - Concentrating in class. She does concentrate but most of the time she be's a bit lazy.

T - Right.....so where do you think that one will go ?

M - Concentrating in class.....um.....shall I just put it in the middle ?

T - Yes, that's fine.

M - Asking for help.....she asks for quite a lot of help.....I'm going to put it there.

T - That's the ones she finds difficult.

M - Um...well she asks for help so it is something difficult isn't it ?

T - OK...right....I see....

M - Do you understand ? Because she finds something difficult and she's asking for help...so that's where it goes in that one.

T - So she doesn't find it difficult to put up her hand and ask....

M - No but she does as well. She goes like that (M. puts her hand up very slightly). She's like one of those. Working with other children....she likes working with children....

T - Right....so where will that one go....

M - I'll put it there (the easy pile). She likes working with children. Finding out about things.....what do you mean about that....finding out things ?

T - Um...if she wanted to find out about something that she was doing in class about light would she be able to find out....to use a book to find out it or would she.....

M - You see I don't know every single answer, do you understand....

T - Um....

M - there are so many of them...

T - And a big range....

M - Yes....so finding out things....I'm not really sure.....

T - Well pop it there (indicates OK pile)...OK ?

M - Yes, I'm not really sure....

T - If you are not sure....

M - Reading...she is very good at reading.....for.....when she gets a book from school and you know when I went for the parent's evening.....I mean I don't miss the parent's evening....I always want to know what my children are doing. Cause like when I was at school my dad always used to come to our parent's evening but when he was at work.....cause my mum can't speak English. My mum, like, she raised us eight brothers and sisters....she was like in the house all the time cooking and cleaning, you know. She never worked in her life, she can't speak English.....she understands everything but she can't speak it...

T - Right.

M -so when we're talking and we'll say oh we're going to go to the shop in a minute she says oh I'll send you to the shop....

T - (laughs).

M -all of us speak English just the way I speak it...all my brothers and sisters, my dad he's just brilliant and um....my dad's retired from work....he was a quality control inspector...

T - Oh right....

M...at a glass bottle factory. So... and he's been working there for 40 years...

T - Gosh....

M - ... the same place. He started brooming.....

T - He's worked his way up.....

M - Yes. he worked his way up.

T - That's great.

M - And, um, listening to the teacher, she does listen to the teacher and she is really good at that..

T - Ok...so that will go under easy...

M- Spelling...spelling, spelling, spelling....yes, she is good at spelling. (home bell rings).

Cause at home she says mum I can spell this, I can do this. I mean I communicate a lot with my kids...you know what I mean...I don't like shove them to one side....I try to spend as much time as I can but sometimes now I've got the baby and she's crying and it's like that...you know, go away....I don't want to know...

T - I can understand that....

M - Sometimes that does happen and I found when I had her Usman was a bit.....Maryam was a bit sensible but when I said to Usman I want...no stop it be quiet ! Let me do this and then I'll come back to you...but Usman was like he would start crying...

T - Right, yes....

M - He thought I was like.....

T - He'll get used to it.

M - I think he'll get used to it. Being quiet in class, well she is always quiet in class.

T - So that will go in the easy one....

M - Singing ! I don't know much about singing...although she sings at home yes.... I think she's good at singing because she sings all the Spice Girls songsshe sings Peter Andre cause we listen to him as well....you know what I mean ? Understanding what the teacher says..um... I'm not sure about that one...

T - You could put it in OK then.....

M - Making things.....keeping your temper (laughs)....

T - If you're not sure about them then....

M - Yes I'll put them there (OK pile). She's quite creative when she wants to be but....keeping your temper.... she has got a bit of a temper but I don't think she loses it in the class....she loses it at home....if she can't find her socks she stands up stairs and she jumps and jumps and just screams all the time. you would not imagine it would you ?

T - Lovely... that must make your life easy (laugh together).

M - You would not imagine that. Being good in class... I think she does be quite good in the class cause Miss Gwinnell says she does be good but it's just that she needs a lot of pushing....but I think she be's good. She helps others...I know that because she does that a lot at home... playing in the playground....she's one of those, she be's very sweet to everyone... It's like she's got this boy in her class called Rajesh. Every Christmas he gets a card off her...

T - Ahhhhhh....

M - no matter what. And then Ishaq and Usman go he's a boy ! I go excuse me I used to have boys who were friends meaning friends not boy friends....they think it's a boyfriend....do you understand ? Like we're Muslims and that and they think that oh boyfriends, boyfriends....it's like something right bad but I don't see it that way. You know what I mean..? Playing in the playground...she does well with kids. Writing....she writes really good...

T - OK, so that goes there (the easy pile). Right, so the ones you said that she would find difficult are her maths and asking for help...

M - Yes.

T - ...and the ones you say she would find easy are this big pile. Writing, playing in the playground, helping others, being good in class, singing, being quiet in class, spelling, listening to the teacher, reading, working with other children and science. OK...out of the ones you think she would find difficult ...you said a bit about asking for help which she finds it difficult to put up her hand...

M - I think she does cause I know the way she is in class because I communicate alot with the teachers as well and she's like...she be's a bit scared...like assemblies for instance... I'll give you an example....like when she did her assembly last time... I always come to the assembly when I know it's my kids' assembly then I'll always be there for there assembly like.....sometimes cause of the baby and that I haven't been coming but beforehandand the teacher goes....well I saw it for myself she was like....when she was getting a certificate

and thingsfor instance she was doing a playshe was right behind and she even had her back to the school so what is she going to do in class. I've seen her sometimes in class when she answers questions... cause she's a bit scared to ask....then I see it that way when.... I think she does find it a bit hard.

T - OK and the doing maths...

M - Maths ? She's alright at maths like but I know Usman is really good....he's really good he is....he just like puts 5 there and 5 there and oh yes that's 10 ! He's like that he is where Maryam....I give her pencil crayons to count at home....so that's why I think she finds it a bit you know...

T - Right. So has the school told you what Maryam is good at and what she finds difficult ?

M - Well like I said when I come to the parent's evening ...she does find some things difficult but she's alright doing the work...it's there inside of her but she needs...you've got to like...if you help her all the time she thinks you're going to help her all the time....you understand ?

T - Right....

M - I know that because I am with her all the time... I mean I'm her mother so I know what....but she needs alot of push....like for instance when she be's reading her...you know when she comes back from Mosque and she be's reading her little Gayda what they call it...a religious booklet....now she is doing really well but before she needed so much push it just didn't get in there... so that's how I see things...

T - Right...so you go to parent's evenings. Are there other ways that the school, the teacher tell you about how she is doing...

M - Well sometimes like, when she has got work to do and I'll be asking....oh she be's in an angry mood sometimes when she comes home for tea and I think what's the matter, has somebody hit you....I ask her a lot of questions. And then she goes I found this thing hard at school and they always give me hard work....

T - (laughs).

M - ...so I go don't worry I'll ask the teacher what happened the next day and then the teacher goes she had help and still she was lacking.....and she got right frustrated...

T - And then she gets angry....

M - Yes, she does she gets really angry she does.

T - Do you feel the school tells you enough about how Maryam's doing at school ?

M - Well then again I don't think they do tell you enough. I don't want to be rude or anything...

T - No, no.... I'm... nothing of this is going to go back to school.....

M -and, um, I can't say they tell you everything but it's a matter of us...we're the parents....like me I always have to ask... I have to ask... oh you know, how did she do today....especially Usman because he's been a bit....at home he plays up so much now that...he's become so difficult so i have to send him to his dad and his dad....I always say to him you don't smack them you tell them....use your mouth not your hands....I don't like it if anyone hits my kids, I'm not like that. I do smack them myself sometimes but like you can't just smack them, smack them all the time. You've got to explain to them why you're shouting at them...do you understand ? So that's how I like to go about it.

T - So how would you like the school to tell you differently about Maryam ?

M - How would I like them to ?

T - Or what would you like them to tell you about

M - You know, say if she's found something difficult in school...um...say if anybody fights in school. Sometimes like they get ignored.... and my son and daughter sometimes say that the teacher at dinnertime don't do whatever... there has been a few things happening. Although my children don't hit anyone....I Haven't had any really complaints that they smack, they fight. Well Maryam I know she doesn't but Usman I know the way he is at home so I would know if there was something like that.... (Maryam and Usman enter the room. M. says she will only be a minute and the children are shooed out).... we're not going to be long now are we ?

T - No, no...are you involved with Maryam in school at all...do you come in and help...

M - No.

T - But you help her at home with her work ?

M - Oh yes. Reading books...if they have got homework. first thing I ask them when they come back from Mosque is have you got homework...have you got a reading book...you know...I always help them as much as I can. Even if it will be 10 minutes, 20 minutes...I try to help them as much as I can. Before they go to bed, because they have to be in bed for 8 o'clock...I don't let them downstairs after 8, unless they are coming to the toilet.

T - Would you like to be more involved ?

M - I would but it's like our lot at home, it's quite difficult...

T - You're very busy....

M - Well, it's not just busy. I mean, they'll be saying things like oh where are you going ? and things like that. It's difficult....

T - Right.

M -the thing is I'm not living in my own house, I'm living with inlaws. It's like don't go here, don't go there....

T - Yes.....OK.....last question. Can you tell me how Maryam is taught in class ? Do you know how she is taught by Ms Gwinnell ?

M - Well that's a bit of a difficult question.....that's a bit difficult to answer.....how she's taught in class.....what do you mean like exactly ?

T - Well do you think the whole class is taught together....

M - No ! They've got groups and things haven't they ? That's what I think, because Maryam tells me I'm in this group. And they've got reading levels....you know...she tells me quite a bit. I mean I don't know everything that's happening, you know what I mean. I'm not there the whole day am I ? So, some things she's in groups - there's a lower group and there's a higher group.....I just know bits and bobs.

T - Right. Thank you. I'll let you get to your children.....

M - You'd better because they are going to have me !

Note : this interview took place in the library. This was chosen by Ms. M.. She said that she wanted to be somewhere where she could be seen in the hall but could not be heard. She explained later that if she couldn't be seen then bad gossip would get back to her mother-in-law and then there would be trouble. She didn't want anyone to hear though, in case the mother-in-law heard that she was criticising the school behind her back. At times Ms. M. was a little uncomfortable and kept looking out the library door into the hall. By the end of the interview there were lots of people in the hall and Ms. M. was very confident, if in a hurry to pick up her children because the bell had gone.

Interview with Maryam (known as Devi) - July 1998.

This interview took place towards the end of the Summer term. It took place within school time and Maryam was taken from a lesson to help me. It took place within my classroom - the children were elsewhere. Maryam had been given a few days notice and the purpose of the interview was explained at that time. She is a quiet, shy girl and I was not surprised that she needed some time to get into the flow of the interview. She didn't feel unduly worried

about the interview and her body language was very calm. I presumed that her English was sufficient for the interview - in retrospect of what she said later (see end of interview) I wonder.

A- So what I thought we would do to begin with to get us going is .. I have written down some of the things that you do in school. Things like doing maths, writing and .. but also things like being quiet in class, finding things out, being good in class. What I would like you to do, would you tell me which of these that you find difficult to do at school and which ones you find easy to do at school. Is that OK ? If we go through them one at a time. So do you find maths easy at school ? You find that easy ?

M- Yes.

A- OK. Instead of nodding your head if you say yes because the microphone can't see you nodding your head. OK, that's one of the problems with using a microphone - I'll have to get a video recorder won't I ?

M- Yes.

A- A video camera so that I can video you at the same time. OK. Do you find writing easy at school ? Or difficult ?

M- No.

A- You find that one difficult. OK we'll put that one there shall we ? What about science, do you find science easy or difficult ? (long pause). Or is that just OK, because I have got a space for just OK here.

M- A little bit OK and a little bit hard sometimes.

A- OK shall we put that in the OK one ? Or the difficult one ?

M- Difficult.

A- OK then, the difficult one. Understanding what the teacher says. Do you find it easy to understand what your teacher says or

M- No.

A- difficult.

M- Difficult and sometimes easy.

A- OK, right. What about spelling ?

M- Easy.

A- You find spelling easy. Right, we will put that there. Do you find working with other children easy or difficult ?

M- Easy.

A- You find it easy to work with others. Do you find it easy to make things ? You know, things like Design Technology.

M- No.

A- You find that

M- A little bit.

A- Do you find it more easy than difficult ? Yes. We'll put that one here then. What about reading ?

M- Easy.

A- OK. Do you find it easy to concentrate in class ? Or do you find yourself fidgeting and looking out of the windows and things

M- Easy.

A- You find it easy to concentrate. What about being quiet ? Do you find it easy to be quiet in class ? Or

M- Yes !

A- It's easy ? Right. Do you find it easy to keep your temper ?

M- Yes (a little unsure).

A- you don't lose your temper ?

M- No.

A- Don't get angry with anyone (teasing) ?

M- No !

A- Oooh.

M- My baby sister

A- oh, right

M- she's naughty at home. She puts her fingers in the gas fire.

A- Gosh, that must hurt !

M- We're going to buy her a fire guard.

A- That's a good idea. But in school you don't find it difficult ? No. What about helping others ? You know, when they say can you help me to do you find that easy or do you find that difficult ?

M- Easy.

A- You find that easy. Do you find it easy asking the teacher for help ?

M- no.

A- No. You find that difficult OK. We'll put that one there. What about finding out things ? (at this point I was interrupted by a member of staff - conversation took only a few seconds). Sorry about that ! What about finding out things ? Like from books or

M- That's easy !

A- You find that easy, OK. What about being good in class ?

M- Easy. Yes.

A- You find it easy to be good in class. OK. What about playing in the playground ? Do you like it out in the playground ?

M- yes.

A- So I'll put it in the easy as well, I guess. What about singing ?

M- Difficult.

A- OK. Right. (I then list the ones that M. said that she found easy). Which one of those do you like best ?

M- Maths.

A- You like doing maths. And you find that really easy ?

M- Yes.

A- Right. Why do you think that you find it easy ? Do you think that there is a reason why you find it easy ?

M- Yes.

A- What's that ?

M- (no response)

A- When the teacher explains things to you do you find it easy to understand straightaway what she is talking about ?

M- yes.

A- you don't have to practise it and practise it and practise it ?

M- No.

A- So you get it first time

M- take aways are easy. You can count on your fingers. You count this way, not up.

A- That's right you do. What do you do if you get stuck in maths ?

M- Put your hand up.

A- Right. And what happens then ?

M- The teacher comes to help you.

A- And do you find that helps you ? (nods) OK. And with all these things you don't get in trouble in school ?

M- No.

A- No-one ever shouts at you or tells you off ?

M- No.

A- That's very impressive. And you never lose your temper or chatter too much ?

M- No.

A- Cor, I wish you were in my class ! So, shall we put those out of the way for a minute and let's look at the things that you find difficult (I then list them). So, which of those things do you find the most difficult ? If you had to choose just one

M- writing.

A- Writing. Right. What do you find difficult about writing ?

M- Stories and things. I can't write full pages.

A- OK, what so when you are writing what is it that you find difficult ? You can't right full

M- I can't think.

A- You mean the ideas for the story

M- Um.

A- Do you find the spelling easy ? (nods) And do you find things like capital letters and full stops easy ?

M- Yes, sometimes and sometimes I forget.

A- OK. So it's the ideas that you get stuck on ? (nods). Right. OK. So what do you do when you get stuck for ideas ?

M- I put my hand up and ask for help.

A- And does the teacher give you some ideas ?

M- Mr. Preston (her current teacher).

A- Right what sort of things does he say ?

M- Sometimes he helps me and in giving me some sentences and sometimes I have to think for myself.

A- And when he gives you the sentences does that help ?

M- Yes.

A- You find that you can write after that ? Or do you write a little bit and then get stuck again ?

M- Yes.

A- You get stuck again

M- yes.

A- OK. With your science, what do you find difficult with your science ?

M- Answering the questions. Some of them I can do, some I can't.

A- Is that because you just don't know the answers or do you find it difficult to listen

M- Difficult to listen.

A- You find it difficult to listen sometimes ?

M- Yes.

A- And you find it difficult to ask for help sometimes (referring to another card).

M- Yes.

A- Do you mean when you put your hand up and things ?

M- Yes.

A- So how do you feel when you put your hand up ? (long pause) Do you feel, I don't know let's think of some words do you feel nervous, do you feel worried

M- Worried.

A- You feel worried what worries you ?

M- Teachers shouting at me.

A- You're worried that if you get stuck the teacher's going to shout at you (nods, M. looked quite anxious at this stage). Right. Why do you think that they might be upset at you ?

M- Because I wasn't listening.

A- Right. so if you say I can't think of anything to write you think the teachers will think that you weren't listening

M- Yes.

A- Do you listen ? (I was trying to make her feel a little happier here)

M- Um. The thing is I don't get it in my head because if miss tells me one thing I forget it in a minute so I just copy my friend's.

A- So this is quite a big one for you - understanding what the teacher says why do you think that you forget it ? Have you got any

ideas about why you think that you forget ? Do you try to listen to what the teacher says ?

M- yes.

A- Right so you are listening carefully. And you don't talk to the other children

M- No.

A- Because you said that earlier. So why do you think that you don't understand ?

M- Because I have got migraines.

A- You get really bad headaches ?

M- Yes, like my dad.

A- Oh, right. Yes, I get migraines as well. They are awful

M- Yes, and I have to wear glasses on.

A- Is that when you have the migraines ?

M- Yes. Since I never had glasses they put drops in my eyes.

A- And does that help (shakes head). No ! You still get the migraines ! Right. What happens when you get a migraine ?

M- you be sick for three days, or one or two.

A- so do you have to stay in bed ?

M- Yes. Well my mum only gives me Ribena.

A- You have to live on Ribena ?

M- And tea.

A- Does that help ?

M- No, because I have a sore throat and you can't swallow, you can't swallow the juice.

A- Right. Ohhhh. Has your mum taken you to the doctors ?

M- Yes. First time when I went there they said that I got, the doctor said that I gotum... does anybody else have a migraine in your house, only my dad and the doctor said that I've got migraines.

A- Yes, my mum gets migraines and so do I. And the doctor says that I get them because my mum gets them.

M- My nanny lives near Yorkshire !

A- Right, yes I know.

M- And my aunty lives in Leeds.

A- and do they get migraines as well ?

M- No, none of them.

A- so it's just your dad and you. Right. Does your brother get migraines ?

M- No, I'm the worstest out of all three of them.

A- and that's why you think that you find things difficult ? Right. Do you find when your head's not hurting you do you still find that you get stuck for ideas ?

M- yes.

A- And that's why do you think that that is ? (long pause) You're not sure ? It's OK you can be not sure. When you feel stuck and worried is that when your migraines start ?

..... Or is it the other way round do you get a migraine and then you get stuck ? And then you get worried ?

M- Yes.

A- which way round is it ? Do you get the migraine first

M- yes.

A- You get the migraine first, and then you really get stuck. Yes, I'm not surprised.

M- I always get headaches.

A- right. Do your teachers know that you get headaches ?

M- Yes. Ms. Gwinnell and Mr. Preston know that I got migraines.

A- how do they know ?

M- My mum told them.

A- And do they know how often they get them ?

M- Yes.

A- so when you start getting stuck and you start finding it difficult to understand do they

do they think uh-oh Maryam's not listening or do they think oh Maryam might have a migraine ? Do you think that they think about your migraine ?

M- I don't know.

A- You don't know. Do they ever ask you if you have got one ?

M- yes, when I be ill sometimes they ask me then.

A- and your mum and dad obviously know that you get migraines.

M- yes.

A- Do they know that causes you to find things difficult at school ?

M- No.

A- No. You've never told them ? (shakes head) So does the teacher tell your mum and dad that you find some things difficult at school ?

M- Just my mum. My dad don't collect me. Because he works at Cadbury's.

A- Oh, right ! Lucky you ! does he bring you home free chocolate ?

M- No! Because he wont work there any more.

A- Oh right, no he mustn't steal them !

M- No !

A- *Mind you my mum gets migraines because she eats chocolate.*

M- I'm allergic to chocolate and cheese, but I don't eat cheese.

A- yes, that's the other thing that my mum can't eat, cheese. So when the teacher tells your mum that you are finding things difficult what do you think that your mum thinks about that ? (long pause) Do you think that she thinks that you must have had a headache or you are being naughty or that you are not listening

M- Headache.

A- A headache, right. So when you start finding things difficult she knows that it's because you have got a headache ?

M- Yes.

A- So she doesn't say that you why didn't you listen Maryam ? or

M_ No.

A- anything like that. OK. With your migraines and things and finding things difficult to understand and your writing and things and when you get stuck for ideas what would you like the teachers to do ? In School ? To help you ?

M- By putting their hand up and by listening to what the teacher says.

A- And is that the way you would like them to help you ?

M- Yes.

A- and that helps you ?

M- Yes.

A- do you ever think that if I put my hand up again they'll think that I'm not listening or

M- No.

A- No. so you don't worry about that at all ?

M- No.

A- OK. Can we play another game just to finish off ? Alright, I have written down some children's names here of children that I have known in the past who have found somethings difficult in school.

M- how much people have you done already ?

A- How many children have I talked to ?

M- Yes.

A- you're the fifth person. so I have done four and you are the fifth. OK ?

M- Yes.

A- But these are children from when I was teaching quite a while ago. And what I would like you to do is to think about how you would help them. If you were the teacher. You have to pretend to have grown up a bit - about a metre taller and about twenty years older. Alright ? You could pretend that you are Ms. Gwinnell (giggles). So i am thinking of someone I used to know called Crystal who, she likes school but she finds it really difficult to write because she can't spell very well. How do you think that you would help her if you were he teacher ? She finds her spelling difficult.

M- Help her a lot.

A- right. How would you help her though ? (long pause). if you get stuck with your spelling - oh, you find spelling easy don't you ? If someone in your class gets stuck with their spelling what are they supposed to do ?

M- put their hand up. Or in the dictionary, look for the word. Or the box with the cards in, look for the letter and find the word.

A- so they have to find the card before they put their hand up ? OK. Another person. Ah, this one might fit you, called Ayesha. The teacher explains what to do in class and she didn't really understand, yes ? You'd explain everything and everybody would go yes we understand but when it actually came to doing the work she wasn't sure what to do.

M- Like me.

A- Like you. So what do you, if you were the teacher how would you help Ayesha ?

M- Ayesha ?

A- Um (long pause) how would you help her if you were the teacher ? (no response) It's OK, you are not sure. That's OK. You are allowed to be not sure. Honestly ! A lot of the time I am not sure about things. We'll just do one more. What about someone called John, not he John in school here. But John is always getting in trouble - he never used to fight or anything like that but he used to talk too much, he used to get out of his seat and wander round. As he used to walk round if someone put down their pencil he used to take their pencil. If you were the teacher what would you do there ? How would you help him ? (no response) What would you say ?

M- Go back in your seat and do what you are told .

A- would you say it crossly ?

M- No.

A- You seem a very gentle person to me. Do you ever get cross with people, apart from your little sister ?

M- My brother.

A- That's Usman.

M- He calls me Fatso !

A- Ohhhhhh ! That's not nice ! I bet you call him a name back though. (giggles) Yes, I bet you do. Do you argue a lot you and Usman ?

M- Sometimes. Sometimes we play games by ourselves with Haleema and Ishaq, because we have got four houses. Haleema and Ishaq live in their own house and we lot got our home. When they come over they always fight with me and Usman, they make us cry and we are bigger than all three of them but Haleema and Usman are both twins.

A- hang on, who is your brother ?

M- Usman.

A- that's what I thought. And Haleema is Ishaq's sister isn't she ?

M- Yes.

A- So do you live in the same house as Usman ?

M- Yes.

A- And Haleema lives in the same house as Ishaq.

M- Yes.

A- but they all come round to your house.

M- Yes.

A- Right, I'm with you. I thought for a minute that you said hat you lived with Haleema and that you got rid of the boys to the other house. That would be quite nice wouldn't it ? have some peace and quiet. OK. We will stop there. thankyou very much for your help - it has been really interesting.

Additional note - a week after the interview.

M and I talked about her difficulty in listening. It turned out that she felt she did not understand the words that were being used - that it was a bilingual issue. I am surprised, I had the impression from the class teacher that M. was extremely fluent in English. I made a

note of what she said about it - it might be useful in discussing ethnicity and bilingualism later.

"I don't mean that I don't listen. I do. It's just that sometimes I don't understand the words. They don't make sense. I get mixed up and I don't learn."

Additional note : at the time of the interview Maryam was in a mixed age class. There was sufficient money in the school budget to allow a supply teacher to be bought in in the mornings at the time of the interview so that the ages could be split for part of the time. The supply teacher was called Mr. Preston. He worked with the class for a term only.

Interview with Teacher K. about Maryam (known as teacher 1)

- June 1998.

The interview took place in K.'s classroom after school one weekday. The time and place had been suggested by K. and was one of a series of interviews carried out concerning children with SEN in her class. I had previously interviewed the mother , but not yet the child herself.

A- so, we're going to talk about Maryam.

K- right.

A- so did you teach Maryam for a whole year or I can never work out

K- um

A- is she one of the younger ones ?

K- I picked her up a year ago last Easter.

A- right.

K- it was Easter that I picked up the year 4s, so it is over a year.

A- right. So she is year 5 now ?

K- four.

A- whereas Gary is year 5

K- four.

A- he's year 4 as well ? Alright, OK (K. laughs at my mistake).

K- does it make any difference ?

A- no, not at all. I just keep thinking that he is a year older than he

K- No, no, no ! Ask Ben - he is in year 4 !

A- so Maryam is with Ben now ?

K- Yes (amused again at my mistake - might be nervousness)

K- let's make sure that we have the right person ! It's Maryam !

A- yes, yes ! So if we could do the same thing as last time (I had interviewed K. before) to think about what she does at school. So if I give you the

K- you want Maryam, the things that she thinks that she is good at ?

A- no, this is what you think that she is good at, finds difficult or easy or OK. So it's your views of her.

K- Um (sorts out cards but this time has some difficulty choosing the exact sets to put cards in - completes quickly but says doesn't know about singing because someone else takes them for singing)

A- Concentrating in class ?

K- it's improved which is why I find it difficult to judge where she is now.

A- OK, was that a difficulty originally when she came into the class ?

K- yes, she switches off. Or she did switch off, she's more able to concentrate but it's not as high as I would like.

A- right. So is that something that you have actually been teaching her to do ?

K- well, drawing her attention, yes.

A- so, do you keep saying Maryam are you listening ? (laughs)

K- I'll put it there.

A- OK.

K- I'd definitely say that that one would be difficult.

A- So science would be the most difficult ?

K- yes. And this understanding what the teacher says goes with the concentration.

A- right, so that's improving.

K- yes. And finding out things has improved as her reading has improved. Well, she has made a tremendous leap - it's not OK

A- right.

K- so with her writing - similar. And her maths.

A- so the basic (at this moment we were interrupted by the caretaker and his hoover ! he was asked to come back later and he left. The interruption was only a few seconds long . K. laughed and found the whole thing very amusing as we had already been interrupted before the interview began). Right, and the ones that she finds easy at school are helping others, working with other children, playing in the playground, being quiet, keeping your temper, and being good. So she is basically a well behaved child ?

K- socially, yes.

A- is that because she is very placid or

K- yes, up until, I would say, a couple of terms she would just be Maryam sat there and had no great desire to produce anything or to particularly to learn anything. When I picked her up it would be painful the amount that she would write and how she would read - so slow and it would be haven't you got nice earrings on and I like your hair like that but she doesn't do that so much anymore. She is much more focused on work.

A- do you know why she was like that ?

K- No, no - I just know that. speaking to other people, she has always been like that. Nothing would make her hurry, nothing.

A- OK. So you feel that her reading, writing and her maths have improved a lot

K- yes to how she was, yes.

A- right. Is that because she is more involved ?

K- yes, and because she is concentrating more. She's listening and she has been working in a smallish group so she is able to ask but she can be quite independent now ... you know, you don't have to breathe over her and say come on, come on finish ! She will set herself a little target.

A- right. And she generally finishes work now.

K- the work that is set for her, yes. It's still not with the main group in the class - she produces a fair amount.

A- right. And you say that she finds science the hardest of all ?

K- yes. She doesn't seem to have any sort of general knowledge I would say. She doesn't have this background that would help her. So she has always started from scratch in whatever we do.

A- do you think that's because she doesn't get taken out somewhere or doesn't get talked with at home or

K- yes, possibly she just hasn't had the experiences that she would need - certainly she goes out, she goes to other, you know, areas of the country to visit but you never find Maryam discussing a nature programme. She wouldn't pick up a non-fiction book - she always goes for fiction.

A- so it's something that she is not interested in or

K- um yet she likes experiments and testing stuff . So she does enjoy it but she doesn't have any background to help her and she is restricted by a general knowledge and then her limitations of reading, writing.

A- does that impact on her work quite a lot ?

K- the general knowledge part ?

A- Um, yes or the reading and writing.

K- well, the reading and writingwell, yes, obviously yes. But as I say there has been a big improvement over the time that I have had her.

A- right. Have you been giving her extra help or

K- she has worked with Anita Rani and Andrea (NNEB support for SEN). So she has always been in those groups and ... but over time, depending on what it is, but over time Maryam has been on the edge. She might be set with the group but she manages to get on on her own. She has certainly made a huge improvement in her reading, huge. Well at decoding I should say ... comprehension well put this down on tape (recently our advisor had criticised the level of reading comprehension in Karen's class from a sample of 3 children. Karen had been really cross both with the public nature of the criticism and the methodology of the work). It certainly hasoh, yes she was one of those children wasn't she ? Was she ?

A- no, yes, she was

K- yes, she was - she picked that book , dog on a broomstick

A- yes, yes. So when Anita and Andrea have had her what have they done with her ?

K- well, it's either maths or language work. it's whatever I have set

A- so it's extra support

K- yes, it's extra support and encouragement to get on with it.

A- right. So is that part of her IEP ?

K- why are you asking me about IEPs ? (both laugh). It is, to produce more work. But I have always set her a target. So she gets extra support I feel very pleased that I have remembered that because I haven't looked at them for some while.

A- right. Had you had an IEP for her ?

K- she has had an IEP, yes.

A- but you don't find it of much help

K- well, it's like with any IEP if there was someone to run it completely every single minute of the day it would have the most benefit. But if it is something that can only be fitted in if you have got time. I mean that if it was a perfect class and they got on with what they were meant to do then yes there would be time but it's not, uh, very satisfactory. Although it obviously has worked in part or something has worked

A- well, she has obviously improved.

K- um.

A- are her parents aware of the difficulties that she has in school ?

K- Um yes her mumwell, I would say yes, when I speak to her mum about her she says oh yes she is like this at home and she doesn't listen. And she does support her and do things if I ask. But, yes, I think that she is aware.

A- right.

K- I'm not sure whether she would measure them against other children in the class, I don't know. So I don't know what degree she sees Maryam as. Ability wise.

A- do you think that she would compare her against Usman ?

K- I don't know Usman so I don't know whether she would or not.

A- so when do you mainly speak to is it mainly Maryam's mum that you mainly speak to ?

K- yes, yes.

A- right.

K- parent's evenings she always comes ummornings she'll drop in and at the end of the day she is always here.

A- so does she initiate the talking with you or do you go up and talk to her ?

K- um both. Both. She is quite open, or she seems to be. And if I have sent homework home and Maryam has had problems with it she will come back and say that. Or she will say that she has had a go at trying to get her to do things. She sees her as pretty unfocussed at home.

A- So when she comes and talks with you does she say how's Maryam doing or does she come in and have an agenda to talk to you about ?

K- Occasionally, she has asked how she is getting on um other times it is in response to something .. her reading book or whatever ... or if I initiate a conversation with her it is

usually to say what she has done, to say that I am pleased with her reading or whatever. I feel as though there is some sort of conversation between us about her most weeks.

A- right. And do you feel that that helps Maryam at home ? Or does it feed into school or

K- I think so, because mum obviously does things with her at home and talks to the dad about it. Well she doesor she has seemed fairly pleased with Maryam's work. When she came in at parent's evening she couldn't believe how much she had done things like that. She came one day to say how impressed she was with her reading because I had pushed her up a stage.

A- right, so it's quite a good relationship between ...

K- I think so. (laughs)

A- the two of you. Right.

K- Is that what she said ? (laugh together) If she said there wasn't then I'm saying there wasn't.

A- There was.

K- good.

A- is that something that you have had to work at or

K- no, no because she is a very open person.

A- yes.

K- she's very nice and quite bubbly.

A- and quite talkative ?

K- very talkative, very talkative. That's why Maryam doesn't talk much, I tell her. She talks too much ! (both laugh).

A- So is mum also aware of what you are doing with Maryam in school ? With going out in the groups and things like that ?

K- Um ... I don't think that she was .. at parent's evening I've said that she has extra support .. I've tried, you know ... to tell her that things happen, that she works in a small group. I think as you said before most parents don't seem to recognise what goes on in the classroom. I mean, with the fact that no-one could get the idea that they were working with Ben in the morning and me in the afternoon so I can't imagine (A. laughs) that they really understood about groups going out and back in !

A- None of the parents knew - none of the children had gone home and said I work with another teacher ?

K- well, they had letters but it all seems very confusing - they don't seem quite sure where they are. Some think that they are there all day and I think some think that he is a student, I'm not sure.

A- so is that something that is almost a difficulty, I suppose ? In terms of getting communication with the parents, that letters sometimes don't go home or

K- I think so ... um ... whether they just seem to be a particularly bad group of children for it (laugh together) about communication going home of any sort.

A- Do they just not deliver it or

K- I'm not sure. I think it would be better if they did something like, we did something like letters went out on a certain day like at my son's school. But because of the same problem - they used to have so many parents ringing up and saying I didn't get a letter, what was it about , they have Tuesdays are newsletter day and we always get a letter and if you haven't got one then you ring up and say that you didn't have one.

A- Oh. That's a clever idea. You know what to expect.

K- Yes. you can put them on your fridge. So that might be something that will overcome this.

A- do you find parent's evenings very helpful ? In sort of chatting with, like Maryam's

K- yes. I do but because of the high level of special needs in the class ... I mean i want to tell them that their children get extra help but I feel embarrassed that they are having to be told this in front of other parents, who are obviously listening because you're always trying to measure your child against somebody else um ... in the same way, if they are having a particular problem it is very difficult to be plain as possible. you end up having to talk in codes and I don't think that everybody understands what you're trying to say. So I think a more private interview would be better.

A- and do you think that is what the parents would like as well ?

K- I think some might be inhibited by the openness in the classroom - some of them feel like they are back at school, I mean they say that (laughs) . They do when they are waiting for me. I think

A- they don't put their hand up

K- (laughing) Who told you to get out of your seat (both laugh) ! But there again, it is nicer in other ways because if there is a communication problem you often get somebody else who will join in I mean I get ... I presume it's all very nice but whether anybody on the other side wishes it was nobody butting in, whatever

A- because that must be a problem in some ways, if you have a parent who doesn't speak English for example,

K- yes. We obviously have translators um ... we did have a problem one year when we couldn't find anybody who could translate.

A- do you think that Maryam's mum is happy with the level of communication between you ?

K- if she said yes, then I'll say yes. (both laugh). I think so, I would imagine that she would come and tell me ... I can't imagine she's someone who would say oh I wish I knew more about itI don't know. Usually I say to parents if there is anything else that you would like to know please come and see me.

A- do you ever discuss the IEP with her ? Has she seen that at all ?

K- no, I don't think that she has seen it, yes. I think the very first, um, I'm trying to remember, the very first parent's evening I had with them I think I had them with me but no-one seemed to be very interested in looking at them so I went back to just saying that they had extra help.

A- do you know why they weren't very interested ? Was it just

K- they probably don't understand what it is. I mean I don't think any of them would know what IEP meant, because we all talk about these ridiculous codes.

A- yes, it's a problem with being called a professional - everybody has their own secret language.

K- Um. And I think maybe showing them a form would worry them .. that their child is documentedI think the form's more frightening

A- I suppose if it is written down it is permanent in some way

K- Um. Yes.

A- right. Last question. Do you think that Maryam's mum knows about how the class generally runs ? Do you think that she has the basic knowledge of the school, the classroom runs. She obviously knows who's Maryam's teacher.

K- Yes ! I can properly say that on this occasion she knows who I am (in a previous interview one of the parents had not known the name of their child's teacher). Um .. I think she does, I think she has got a fair idea. Um I'm trying to think if she has ever said anything I think so, because she always talks about when she was at school. Now whether she is referring to secondary school or primary school I'm not sure. She never seems surprised at the subjects that Maryam does when you put out the books and things or say I didn't know they did this. But I'm not sure if she knows about, um, moving with classroom assistants or she might not understand all that.

A- OK.

K- finished ?

A- yes. Thank you very much.

Appendix 3 - Interview transcripts for the Natelle grouping of relationships (known as Belinda in the body of the text).

Interview with Natell's mother -Ms. M. (known as parent B) - November 1998.

The interview took place at 2.30 PM during the school day. I had been given some time out of class to work on ICT and had negotiated with the HT to do the work at home so that I could conduct the interview. Ms. M. was very nervous and obviously aware of the time passing as she had to leave at 3.20 on the dot. Her young child was also present and while I provided toys to play with mum was constantly distracted by the child.

The nervousness arose because of the recording of the interview and the presence of the microphone on the table - this is the first time that this issue has arisen so openly. I suspect that as the interview reveals a large part of the problem is that Ms. M. generally only talks to staff when there is a problem with Natelle and there was already a sense of nervousness which was exaggerated by the thought of her words being recorded. I am at the end of the day a member of staff at the school ! However, thinking about the interview I feel that she was honest in what she said and within her nervousness did try to answer the questions as best she could (*notes scribbled the same evening at home*).

T- Can I start by asking you a little about your own schooling ?

M- yes.

T- were you born in this country ?

M- yes.

T- were you born in Birmingham ?

M- no, I was actually brought up in London but then I moved over when I was say about 3 to come and live with my grandma and that, because my mum died when I was a young child so most of my life I was brought up with my grandparents.

T- so you went to school in Birmingham ?

M- yes.

T- did you enjoy school ?

M- yes. I enjoyed school. I never really liked maths, or anything like that. I enjoyed English, PE .. um ... yes, I did enjoy it because I was the only child at home so it was good to go and meet all the other children and be with the other children.

T- and do you think that you were treated well at school ?

M- yes.

T- you didn't suffer any form of racism or

M- no ...

T- that's good.

M- yes, I think so.

T- OK going over to Natelle a bit .. do you think that Natelle enjoys school ?

M- yes, I think ... I think that she does enjoy it ... um she's got her is it taping ?

T- yes. (I had looked at the machine to make sure that it was working and M had spotted me - notes)

M- I think that she enjoys school. She likes her maths and her PE ... yes, she does.

T- so she gets up in the morning and looks forward to coming

M- yes.

T- what is it you think that you want Natelle to get from school ? What do you hope that she is going to get ?

M- right. A good education.

T- what do you mean by a good education ?

M- what they have been taught and things like that ... um

T- what do you hope that she will do with her education ?

M- well, take it further ...um.. hopefully go to college. She has told me already that she would like to be a teacher and that when she leaves school (both laugh).

T- so you sort of look on it as a first step in a long process ?

M- yes.

T- right. What do you think that the school wants for Natelle ? Do you think that the school has the same aims ? Or do you think that they are different ?

M- probably the same, yes. (we are interrupted by the child playing with the microphone- we both laugh). Yes, mainly the same.

T- so would you say that Natelle's schooling was important to you ?

M- Natelle's schooling ?

T- yes.

M- is important, yes. It's important for myself and for Natelle.

T- OK what I thought we could do to look at how you think that she is doing at school and the things that she finds easy and difficult this is just a card game. what i have done is written down lots and lots of things that children do in school. If you think that Natelle finds it difficult pop it there. If you think that she finds it easy at school pop it there. If you are not sure or you think that she just finds it OK then if you pop it there. But it is what you think Natelle finds easy or difficult, rather than what the school thinks. Is that OK ?

M- yes. (sorts cards) Am I doing it right, yes ?

T- yes. You are saying that the things that Natelle finds difficult

M- yes, and just place these

T- you can place as many as you want on each pile.

M- right.

T- they can all go on one pile if you want to.

M- (continues sorting with real care and thought for another 2-3 minutes child keeps interrupting because he is bored so I go and find a toy while M. completes the sorting).

T- OK, right. So the ones that you think that she finds difficult ...

M- difficult.

T- in school are being good in class, sharing with others, being quiet in class, and concentrating ?

M- yes.

T- and the ones that you think that she finds easy are playing in the playground, reading, maths, singing and spelling ?

M- yes.

T- do you think that there are any that I have missed off ? Any that she finds particularly easy or she finds difficult ?

M- um let's have another look listening.

T- OK, let's write that down. Do you mean listening to the teacher

M- well, the teachers, yes.

T- so, out of the ones that she finds easier why do you think that she finds those easier ?

M- well, when she comes back at home and when I do get to spend time with her, which is mainly I must say at the weekends, um the work that she has been given from school she finds easy. And the spelling she finds easy - like on the little spelling tests and things like that. The maths and that I've seen that for myself - the adding and the taking away. She

there are no problems with that. Her reading is very good as well ... um the singing um ... I don't really come much to assembly but when I have been here or when she does come home she does sing a few of the songs with her sister. Playing in the playground um I think all kids like to play so

T- yes, they do So in terms of her work she finds most of her work fairly straightforward ...

M- yes, reasonably.

T- that's good. In terms of the things that she finds more difficult - concentrating, being quiet, sharing and being good.

M- right

T- sorry, you were going to say

M- you want me to explain why I have chosen, why I have put them in that category.

T- yes, you can do, yes.

M- the reason why I say that she finds it difficult being good in class is because when I go to pick her up the teacher always says that oh she has been very upperty today - things like that, that she hasn't been too good or has been sent out to Mr. Leach. Um ... concentrating .. she can't really sit down in one place for very long in one place without messing about or distracting somebody else. Um ... quiet in class ... she's quite loud in class and bossy .. she likes to boss the other children about. Sharing with others ... I'm not sure what she is like at school with the other children but at home she doesn't really like to share that much with her sister so

T- so you are basing your ideas partly on what the school has .. what the teacher has said to you

M- yes.

T- and partly what she does at home.

M- partly what she does at home, yes.

T- why do think that she finds these more difficult ? Because from what you have popped here in terms of work she finds the work fairly easy

M- yes.

T- so do you think that there is a reason why she finds those things more difficult in school ?

M- I don't know, to be honest with you. I was kind of like that myself when I was in school. I'm not saying that I was like the naughtiest child in the class but concentrating and

distracting others from their work and like being quiet I was more or less like she is now. Um

T- and you think that affects how Natelle is ?

M- yes, like not being good in class because it is not really very nice coming to school knowing that she hasn't been good throughout the whole of the week and things like that. And when she goes home I have to speak to her ... I have to tell her off and things like that to let her know that it is not good ... um ... so, it's not really nice

T- so do you come into school in like fear and trepidation ?

M- what do you mean ?

T- sorry ! When you come in do you look forward to coming in and picking her up ? Or do you think oh no what is going to happen today ?

M- yes, what is going to happen ... or I wonder if she has been good or if she has been naughty .. but

T- in terms of you having contact with the school is that the main form of contact that you have with school ... when you come into school and the teacher says whether Natelle has been naughty today or ...

M- yes. Like is that the main contact ? Yes. Because me myself I am at college and I don't really get to come and see the assemblies or things like that .. um so it is only really when I come to pick her up or drop her off in the morning.

T- right. do you come to things like Parent's Evenings ?

M- yes, yes.

T- and how do you find those ?

M- um, quite fair. Quite fair they are.

T- do you find that the teachers say positive things ...

M- as well as negative things ? Yes. They say both positive and negative. And it is good to see what she has been getting up to and to have a chat with the teacher so

T- do you feel that you have a good relationship with the school ?

M- um

T- are you happy with how you get on with the school ?

M- um

T- with how the school deals with yourself and Natelle ?

M- um sorry say that again, sorry.

T- are you happy with how you have contact with the school ?

M- well because I am at college and that I don't really come in as much so um I can't really say that I have good contact with the school because I don't really come in... like some of the other mothers might come into assemblies and things like that

T- has the school told you the strengths that Natelle has as well as the things that she does wrong ?

M- um ... well ... when she tends to work with other kids she tends to mess about so they have tried .. I have spoken to her teacher Mrs. Chinner .. I have spoken with her and we arranged for like Natelle to see how she would get on working by herself and she seems to work better she seems to work better when she is by herself .. like when there is nobody around her or nobody to distract .

T- and who thought of that idea .. was that Mrs. Chinner or was that yourself ?

M- I think that it was both of us.

T- so did you have a meeting after school or

M- no, I wouldn't say a meeting but just where she has asked me if I can stop and talk a minute or she can have a word with me ?

T- have you ever sort of sat down with the teacher and talked about how to help Natelle in school ? Because you obviously sound a bit concerned about these things.

M- yes, I am. Ms. Fitzpatrick ... me and her sat down and she thought of a suggestion to help Natelle. That was if she got 10 stickers ... Ms. Bagnall is doing it as well ... if she gets a certain amount of stickers she gets a prize at the end of the week ... which I thought was pretty nice.

T- is that fairly effective, or

M- not really, no.

T- and that was Ms. Fitzpatrick's idea to have that meeting ?

M- yes, well yes.

T- do you feel that if you were concerned you could go to the teacher

M- yes

T- and talk about what to do ?

M- yes. Or if I am not happy with something I would go and speak to the teacher.

T- and do you feel that your opinions are sought by the teacher ? That they actually ask you what it is you think and what it is that you want ?

M- (disturbed by child) sorry, can you say that again ?

T- when you talk to the teachers do you feel that they listen to what you say ?

M- oh yes, yes.

T- so they take account of that ?

M- yes, yes.

T- so when you have a meeting the ideas are both of yours ?

M- yes. We both agree on something.

T- and if you suggested to the teacher a way of dealing with Natelle in school do you feel that you would be listened to ?

M- yes.

T- have you had any meetings just out side the classroom teacher ? Like with Mr. Lanyon or

M- no.

T- are you aware of any special provision made for Natelle within school for Natelle apart from the stickers ?

M- no. When you say special provision ?

T- that someone like a classroom assistant works with Natelle or she works in a small group ... or she does different work from the other children I don't know whether she does, I am just asking.

M- no, I don't know.

T- with these things that you think that Natelle finds difficult does Natelle think that she finds them difficult ?

M- yes, like the concentrating sometimes she will say that she finds it hard and things like that.

T- has she said why she finds it difficult ?

M- no she just says that I find it hard.

T- a slightly difficult question I suppose

M- yes

T- in terms of the school teaching Natelle and you being her mother what do you think your role is in Natelle's education ?

M- to be a good mother to my child and to make her know what is right and wrong ... um ... to try and be there as I say because I am at college and at work also in the evening now I am starting to feel a bit guilty because I don't really see them as much and it is only the weekend and now it is like the days are just going by quickly and it's like the weekends aren't really enough

T- you must miss seeing her

M- yes, both of them ... yes.

T- so with you working at college and then at work in the evening do you find that you aren't involved as much as you would like to be with what she does ...

M- yes, like the assemblies and all of that.

T- so you would like to be more involved ?

M- yes.

T- how do you think that the school could help you do that ?

M-

T- because I guess it would be difficult to move assemblies out to the times that you would be able to come

M- probably to talk I don't know, it would probably be difficult but ... the teacher has other children to watch and you know, discuss things with other parents

T- so you would like more time to talk or a different time to talk ?

M- yes, or more time yes.

T- do you feel that you are rushed ?

M- yes. Because straight after I come for Natelle I have to head off and go to work.

T- so do you feel that if you said to Mrs. Bagnall I would like to talk to you about Natelle do you think that you would be able to find a time that was convenient to the two of you ?

..... Or do you feel that you would have to fit within the school's time ?

M- I feel as if I could find a time.

T- and you feel that the school would make that time as well ?

M- yes.

T- Just a couple more questions - I am sorry for the pause but I am skimming through my notes to try not to keep you too long (Natelle had appeared at the door momentarily and it was getting near the end of school). When the teacher comes to you in the evening and tells you that Natelle's done so and so ...

M- yes.

T- how do you feel about that ?

M- a bit fed up, you know ... a bit fed up with her, because I will probably say to her in the morning or the night when she goes to bed make sure that you are good at school and, just a bit fed up and sometimes angry as well

T- when you say angry do you mean angry with Natelle or angry with the school ?

M- no, angry with Natelle because she hasn't listened or so

T- so you trust the school in what they say ?

M- yes.

T- so I suppose if the school says that Natelle did this or that you would accept that she did ?

M- at one stage well I felt that she was being a bit picked on um and I wasn't really too happy with that. After a while well I believe that I was keeping being told negative things, I wasn't being told anything positive so I felt like she was being picked on. But then after that I sat down and spoke I started to hear positive things and things like that. She is all right now

T- so who did you speak with ... sorry ?

M- um.

T- the class teacher ?

M- yes.

T- so you were hearing lots of negative things and you sat down and had a chat with them and things got a bit more positive. Do you feel that they should have been more positive to begin with ?

M- not really, but it was just all the time really ... the negative things and I would probably speak to Natelle and ask what did you do or why did she get in trouble what she told me I probably didn't feel that it was right for her to get sent out of class or something like that.

T- so you felt that it was a fairly minor thing ?

M- yes or some of the things that she probably did in class you know it was minor, it didn't have to be made out to be something ... you know, really big

T- so how would you have preferred the school to have dealt with that situation ?

M- like dealt with ?

T- you had obviously got to a stage where you were feeling pretty fed up

M- yes.

T- the way that school was telling you things

M- yes

T- if you could have told the teacher how you would like it to be dealt with better what would you have said to them ?

M- well probably if she HAS to be sent out of class or she did something really bad or minor things I feel that ... like it is the teacher's job and they it should be able to be

dealt with. If it is too much of a problem tell me certain little things like I felt it was nothing really to complain about ... so

T- and you felt like the teacher was complaining

M- yes.

T- but in terms of how the teacher told you about that How would you like that to be improved ?

M- (no answer but facial expression was one of thought - by this time M was facially showing a little crossness)

T- do you wish that they had sat down and talked it all through with you ?

M- yes not all the time but to come across like pleasant and not so pressured like the teacher looks so fed up (both smile and laugh - this broke the tension a little) .

T- and that puts you off I guess !

M- yes !

T- so you felt that they put it across as if they were cross with you as well ?

M- yes. Perhaps they could talk to me in a friendlier way that's it really I'm not really good with words

T- that's OK - I'm not looking for any particular answer ... I am trying to understand how you feel about your daughter's education and how she is doing at school and the ways in which you are involved with that and parents are involved in different ways obviously with your college and your job it must be really difficult for you

M- yes, it is .

T- so actually finding time to come to things like parent's evenings must be quite

M- hard, yes. hard.

T- do you wish that the school would have parent's evenings at different times ?

M- yes, I say that though because I am at work it is a bit difficult. If I wasn't working now, those times I would find appropriate for me but because I am at work and the time that I finish it would be too late really. It just when the teacher can find the time in the day because she is teaching herself so it wouldn't be appropriate for her to do it any earlier.

T- OK shall we leave it there is there anything that you would like to add ?

M- I don't think so.

T- thank you.

We then talked about how she found the interview briefly and agreed to talk further later, if necessary.

Interview with Natelle (known as Belinda) - March 1999.

Interview took place in the library during the school day. The voices of children could be heard from either side of the room. Natelle appeared nervous but was extremely keen for me to talk to her - she had been asking me when i would do it all week and looked on it as something special just for her. Before turning the tape on I took 5 minutes or so to chat with Natelle about her day to try and ease her obvious nerves.

T- so OK what I want to ask you are some questions about how you think that you are doing at school and how you work in the classroom ... alright ? nothing scary or to worry about and whatever you say I won't tell Mrs. Bagnall anything or Mr Lanyon or your mummy OK .. and all I am going to do with the tape is when I have finished taping what we are saying then I am going to type it all out on my computer and then I can use them in my writing but no-one will ever know it is you ... just about the school. Is that OK (N nods head and smiles) ? OK, the first thing I want to ask you is , do you like school ? (N nods head)

N- yes.

T- you do. What do you like best about school ?

N- when it is my birthday and I get to choose people and share the sweets out with all the teachers (it had been her birthday earlier that week).

T- right ... and why is that very good ?

N- because it is fun.

T- and you like to have fun ?

N- yes.

T- and what don't you like about school ? What is not so good about school ?

N- going to Mr. Leach.

T- you don't like going to Mr Leach ? Why do you have to go to Mr Leach ?

N- for being naughty and when I get 4 sad faces.

T- and does he tell you off ?

N- um (nods head - looks sad).

T- you don't like being told off ?

N- shakes head and very inaudible no.

T- OK right, what I thought we could do to think a bit more about the things that you do at school is to play a little game. Alright ? (N nods and looks interested, not so downcast). I have got three boxes here. I have got one for things that you think you find difficult at school, one for things that you think that you find easy at school and one for things that you are not too sure about or are just OK. So things that you find really difficult

N- (indicates centre box) or if you are not sure.

T- that's right and this one is for things that you find really easy. So what about the first one ... understanding what the teacher says..... do you find that very difficult, easy to understand (N indicates difficult) You find it difficult ... you don't understand what the teacher says a lot of the time ? OK, then we'll put it there (difficult box)

N- there

T- yes, that's fine. concentrating in class.

N- easy !

T- you find that easy ...

N- um ... listening.

T- what about finding out things ... if you want to find out something ?

N- easy.

T- you find that one easy as well ... OK we will put that one there. what about spelling ?

N- difficult.

T- OK, what about doing science ?

N- OK (I had the impression she was unsure what I meant here)

T- what about making things ? Do you

N- easy !

T- what about asking the teacher for help ?

N- difficult.

T- what about reading ?

N- not too sure.

T- not too sure ... OK good what about writing ? To write stories and things ?

N- easy.

T- OK (at this point the secretary enters the room to tell me that there has been a phone call for me. N. is interested and loses a bit of focus)

N- (points to microphone) what's that ?

T- it's a microphone it is recording what you say What about maths ? Do you find maths difficult, or easy or OK ?

N- not sure.

T- OK ... what about working with other children ?

N- OK ... it's OK (N. appears to be focused again but responded very quickly here compared to her other answers so far).

T- what about helping the other children ?

N- easy.

T- what about being good in class ?

N- easy.

T- do you really (N nods definitely) OK. What about sharing with others ? (N nods head) You find it easy to share with others ... OK. What about playing in the playground ?

N- easy.

T- you find it easy to play with others in the playground. What about keeping your temper ?

N_ not too sure.

T- OK and what about being quiet in class ?

N- OK.

T- right ... Mrs. Bagnall doesn't have to say Come on Natelle be quiet ! What about singing ?

N- OK.

T- OK let's have a look at the ones that you found difficult. Let's see what you have got. You have got asking for help, spelling and understanding what the teacher says. Which one of those do you find the most difficult ?

N- spelling.

T- right ... what is about spelling that you find really difficult ?

N- if you can't spell, you have difficulty then if the teacher tells you to try then you have to say that you can't do it and then she the teacher helps you.

T- and how does she help you ?

N- she tells you the words

T- right so she tells you the letters and you write them down

N- yes.

T- OKgood. So why do you find asking for help difficult ?

..... what is it about asking the teacher for help that you find difficult ?

N- because I wasn't listening I need help.

T- right and does the teacher give you help when you ask for it ?

N- yes.

T- but you find that difficult to do , to ask for help ?

N- yes.

T- do you know why you find it difficult ?

N- because

T- it's OK. If you are not sure that is fine. What about understanding what the teacher says ?

N- that I feel sweaty and I need to move about.

T- so you find it difficult to sit still ?

N- um

T- and you feel all hot and sweaty.

N- yes.

T- right and how does that stop you understanding what the teacher says ?

N- by by making by not sitting still

T- right .. do you find it difficult to listen if you don't sit still ?

N- um

T- is that something that you get in trouble for ?

N- yes.

T- so does Mrs. Bagnall ever call you a fidget or something ?

N- yes (laughs).

T- ah- hah ! That is one of her favourite words, fidget, she likes that word. OK do you think that Mrs. Bagnall thinks that you find those things difficult ?

N- I don't know.

T- what do you think that Mrs. Bagnall thinks that you find difficult ?

N- spellings.

T- so you think Mrs. Bagnall thinks you find spelling difficult as well. Do you think if I asked her she would also say these two things - asking for help or understanding what she says ?

N- I'm not sure. I think so. I do find them difficult. I think she would say that.

T- OK fair enough. Has Mrs. Bagnall or a teacher ever asked you what you find difficult ?
Have they ever said to you Natelle what do you find difficult ?

N- no.

T- so do you think Mrs. Bagnall knows what you think ?

N- yes.

T- how does she know ?

N- because I don't know spellings of the word and I have to ask her.

T- right ... so because you ask her how to spell lots of words she knows that you find that difficult ?

N- yes, I think so.

T- OK do you think that your mum knows that you find these things difficult ?

N- (longish pause) yes (N was unsure whether to answer here)

T- OK ... how does she know ?

N- if I don't know how to spell um scarecrow then she will tell me the word. So she can tell.

T- right. have you ever told her that you find these things difficult ?

N- no.

T- or has she ever asked you what you think that you find difficult at school ?

N- yes.

T- and you told her these things ?

N- um, yes, the spelling.

T- yes, that seems to be the one that you think you find most difficult ?

N- yes.

T- OK does anyone else help you in school with your work ?

N- children.

T- so when you get stuck you ask them ?

N- yes, they sometimes help me.

T- OK so imagine that you are finding a spelling difficult you want to spell scarecrow and you couldn't spell it what would you do ?

N- ask somebody to help you. I would ask the children

T- OK ... who thought of that idea ... did you think of that ?

N- ask the children, then the teachers. Ask the children first, that's what they say to me.

T- right how would you like the teachers to help you Natelle ? (pause) If I was your teacher and I asked you how you would like to be helped at school what would you say to me ?

N- I need some help. Can you spell the word scarecrow ? Tell me the letters, don't make me guess. I don't know how to.

T- OK ... are there any grown up in class who help you as well ?

N- yes, my mummy and daddy and my uncles

T and they help you at home ?

N- yes.

T- and is there anyone who helps you in school ?

N- yes, Mr. leach and you (smiles and we laugh together).

T- OK ... how does Mr. Leach help you ?

N- he says how to spell the word.

T- so does he teach in your class sometimes ?

N- yes, sometimes. And this morning I had an eye test and an ear test. And if you hear something you have to drop these circle things in the bowl. And then you have to look and they put something on your eye and you have to say the letters on the top.

T- OK you said at the start that you didn't like going to Mr. Leach when you were in trouble. So what does Mr. Leach do with you that you don't like ?

N- I get shouted at

T- does that help you ?

N- no and he let's my mummy know that helps me to be good (N looks worried here - possibly because of feeling giving away secrets if she says anything further).

T- OK and do you go to Thumbs Up group as well ?

N- yes.

T- what's it like there ... I've never been there.

N- every time you get your target then you win a bag of sweets for the class.

T- a target ? What's this target ?

N- It has lines and it has got squares. And you fill them up by being good ... at dinnertimes and in the playground and class and things like that.

T- and who do you do that with ?

N- Ms. Bagnall.

T- and how do you decide what your target is ?

N- um someone else decides for me Mr. Lanyon.

T- Mr. Lanyon ? Oh, of course, he goes to Thumbs Up doesn't he ?

N- yes.

T- and what sort of things do you talk about ?

N- we talk about behaving ... and things like that .

T- and does he let you choose your target ?

N- he chooses it for me.

T- so he chooses your target and then it is your job to get all of your squares filled in.

N- yes. And if you do you get a bag of sweeties. But you don't take as many as you want ... you have to take them and give them to how many children there are and it's my birthday

T- so you take sweets for the other children in the class ?

N- yes.

T- that's very nice. So do you get your target very often ?

N- yes.

T- and does that help you ?

N- yes.

T- can you tell me why it helps you ?

N- because everyday you get a bag of sweets (she means every week).

T- and you don't mind sharing them with the other children ?

N- no sometimes I do yes sometimes I want them for myself the other children like it then like me when i get the sweets . Why don't you make some of your children go to Thumbs Up group ?

T- because I don't have anybody who goes there at the moment do I ? (I felt n was trying to find out why she went at this point - that she wanted me to say whether i thought she was good or not and why I thought that - her facial expression was one of confusion and she was probing). It is not really for very young children ... it is really for more grown up children like you, or even older than you .

N- I'm 7.

T- yes, well most of my children are still 4 and they are a bit young for something as grown up as Thumbs Up. Because it is really for grown up children isn't it ? I don't think they would understand about the targets and things. Does your mum know about you going to Thumbs Up ?

N- yes, because I tell her. I tell her that I can get sweets for my class.

T- and does that make her happy ?

N- yes.

T- OK do you think that your mum and Mrs. Bagnall ever talk about you and how you are doing at school ?

N- yes. About my behaviour in school and how I am doing at Thumbs Up group.

T- do you know when they talk ?

N- yes, every day at home time about my behaviour.

T- so does she want to find out if you have been good or not ?

N- yes and she gives me smacks ... if I don't behave (this felt like a secret shared but N also enjoyed telling me. I felt at the time that she was also trying to find out what I thought about her mum smacking her). And does she give you anything if you are good ?

N- yes she gives me sweets ... a full bag of sweets..... and some crisps and juice and lets me play upstairs (said with pleasure in voice).

T- and do you like that ?

N- yes.

T- so when mum asks does that help you be good ?

N- yes sometimes I get smacked but a lot of the time I look forward to the special treats.

T- so do you look forward to the end of the day when your mummy asks Mrs. Bagnall ?

N- I might have been a good girl today ... especially since it has been my birthday.

T- OK right ... and do you think that your mum and Mrs. Bagnall talk about anything else except for your behaviour ?

N- no.

T- OK ... one last question. Do you think that you do behave badly in school ?

N- yes.

T- why ?

N- because it is hard and difficult to sit still and to do your maths because i can't wait to have dinner or playtime so that I can mess about outside

T- so that's why you think that you behave in the way that you do ?

N- yes, I think so. If I could sit still I would get a whole bag of sweets and I could be greedy !

T- OK then ...let's stop there and listen to a bit of the tape ... then you can hear your voice.

Interview with Teacher B. about Natelle (known as Teacher 2) - December 1998.

The interview took place in B's classroom after school near Christmas. It took the form of two discussions separated by a week. The first concerned more general questions and the second more specific questions about Natelle. We were not interrupted and while B was obviously quite tired Natelle was having quite a good few days.

T- Can I sort of sort of split the interview into two parts, so if we only get one part done today so if we could look first of all at your ideas about special needs more generally than Natelle. So, a really general question to begin with, what do you think a special need is ? When you think about special needs what sort of things do you think about ?

B- well, a child that has a physical difficulty that they need to overcome to help them to ... uh ... adapt, to fit into school. But also a learning difficulty uh ... but it could also be an emotional, behavioural difficulty as well.

T- OK. What do you mean by learning difficulty ?

B- maybe a child who is not seen to be keeping up with it's peers.

T- and you said you began to say what some of the causes of special needs are .. um can we write some of those down so that we can look at them ?

B- yes.

T- so one of them would be a learning difficulty

B- yes.

T- you would say that that was not keeping up

B- it might be not keeping up or it might be a known .. a sort of specific problem. Maybe the child does have a particular syndrome or you know. A specific problem. Probably related to a medical condition as well.

T- so another would be medical

B- yes.

T- OK, so we have got those two. Would you say that there are any other causes for a child to have special needs ?

B- yes, when a child has a physical difficulty which makes some activities a bit problematic for them . The child might have emotional problems which may be related to home difficulties or

T- so they might be home

B- they might be home difficulties or they might just be a child who is, for whatever reason, immature for their age.

T- I'm writing as fast as I can ! (both laugh quietly) I just hope that it is readable.

B- and there are behavioural difficulties for, I would imagine, a range of reasons the child finds it difficult to fit in or co-operate ... yes, conform

T- so what would you say are some of the causes of behavioural difficulties with children ?

B- um I think that some of them are learnt, some of them are ones that they must bring from home and

T- so learnt behaviour ?

B- yes. Um ... other children might just not have recognised the importance of school and learning they might not find the curriculum particularly interesting or relevant to them.

T- so the curriculum not important or relevant ?

B- yes, or maybe just not interesting to them.

T- OK. Do you think that there are any other causes ?

B- Um I think that it might perhaps fit in with that one there might be some children who um ... I don't know how you would express it but they just have low intelligence ... whether that fits in with a specific problem as such I am a bit wary ... I don't like the use of that low IQ sort of ... but there are going to be some children who are not ... I think it fits in with keeping up with their peers people like the " slow Learners " ... I don't like the terminology but you

T- I know what you mean and would you say the reasons for that are

B- well, maybe they've not had an input before coming to school, they may not have had parents who are interested in children learning through play, they may not have had a lot of books read or may not have much pre-school experience ... limited experience before school possibly ... and maybe not a lot of support at home once they have started school. Not that I am saying every SEN child .. some children have not have any of that and still keep going, that might be a reason um

T- presumably if they had all the support in the world and they were still finding life difficult you would say that the difficulty was a medical

B- yes. Home difficulties in terms of emotional problems, there might be like social problems where children .. um ... they may not be emotionally deprived or ... but maybe they have poor housing or cramped housing whereby it is difficult for them to find a quiet corner for them to read or you know the home environment may not be very comfortable there may not be anything wrong with their abilities and they may have very loving parents but they may be tested because of social problems. I can't really think of any more

T- that's a lot (both laugh). It's an impressive list ! Right, out of those, and this is probably an impossible question, which do you think is the main cause of children having special needs ? Which ones are ones that you would say that you sort of see a lot of the time ? Compared to the ones that are more peripheral.

B- yes. Um you don't see many of those ... you don't really see many of those the behaviour and the emotional tend to be often together um gosh this is difficult you do see children with poor housing but there a often a lot of other factors

T- so the social conditions are often peripheral ?

B- yes. They are a small part of everything. Quite a few for a variety of learning difficulties. Those two often go together .. if a child is not keeping up they will often get a bit disinterested until you sort out what is going to help them

T- so would you put it that way round that if they are not keeping up they tend to lose interest ?

B- oh yes ... there are some children who have got ability but for some reason they have got a difficulty in one area and get a bit disenchanted and then they just fall behind and they have to catch up when they are supported. Once they have been supported and they have caught up or developed anew skill they get a bit more inspired ... um I don't really like that one ! ...

T- the low intelligence one - yes..

B- I think that one fits

T- it's a horrible

B- that one can fit in with

T- I'll tell you what, we will turn that one over !

B- yes. It's a bit of a nasty label.

T- i will shred it - later I will throw these away later anyway so I wont keep them.

B- every child that I have had in this school i have had one child with a specific learning difficulty um

T- when you say a specific one do you mean that it has a label

B- yes, like this year the child has autism .. um last year there was a child ... I don't want to say what it is because I would have to name names but there has always been a child who has had more than just an IEP ... they have had a specific problem the rest have really been emotional and behavioural difficulties.

T- and in terms of their specific problem how do you know that they have got a specific problem ?

B- because they have gone through the medical side as well as being picked up in school. You know, there was the child last year who had problems with interpretation of language and it wasn't because it was E2L it was because of a communication difficulty ...

T- so that was something that was picked up by outside

B- yes.

T- was that something that was started by the school, do you know ?

B- yes.

T- so the educational psychologist was involved

B- yes and speech therapists and people like that.

T- and most of the others have been more emotional and behavioural ?

B- yes, and I often find it difficult to split the two up. Rarely have I come across children with a behavioural difficulty rarely have they just been awkward children. Usually when you investigate and get to know the child more you get to realise that they are having difficulty in an emotional area.

T- so how would you define emotional as opposed to behavioural ? What would you say that the difference is ?

B- well, the emotional seems to be how they are feeling ... I'm thinking of one child in particular... you know, like they get very easily tearful and upset about if things aren't going their way and they'll do that to a degree and still don't get their needs, what they perceive as their needs met they'll start behaving awkward or being spiteful to the other children. The emotional problems tend to manifest in anti-social behaviour.

T- and you would say that a lot of that is from the home

B- I think the way that they respond to their frustration but I can only say that of the children whose parents I've met and seen how they deal with frustration. You have to assume that if the adults are behaving like that, that is what they have witnessed and have decided oh that's how you deal with it I wouldn't

T- so if they see someone respond angrily at home that comes through in their behaviour

B- yes. There are other children that I have met who have had emotional problems and they have acted in a certain way but I wouldn't be able to say for definite that that is learnt behaviour, you assume it is but ... um ... I do think that a lot of children do respond because they have seen that's how you deal with it.

T- so would it be fair to say that if they were treated differently at home you feel that a lot of their emotional problems and their behavioural problems would go away ?

B- possibly, there are going to be some children who have the calmest, most placid parents who are still going to have tempers or be immature at dealing with their frustrations or whatever ... um ... so it is not a hard and fast rule to say if you have got a child who has got emotional problems they are going to behave in an anti-social way .. well in an aggressive manner it's not always learnt but I feel that there is a lot that is learnt from how you respond back to a child.

T- OK ... presumably children that have emotional or behavioural difficulties have an IEP.....

B- yes.

T- can I ask you what you think the purpose of an IEP is, what do you think that it is there for ?

B- I think it is to pinpoint a child who's initially you alight on and just seems to have a difficulty whatever that might be and then you pinpoint and try to be specific about that difficulty and then you try and break down well, what can we do to help that child to overcome that difficulty. Or if it is a behavioural problem what can we do to reinforce the positive behaviour and then maybe as well what can we show that that child can do to help raise it's self-esteem. ... And to help it with it's education.

T- so when you say break it down, it's very focused

B- in small steps. I mean sometimes you can have a child who appears to have a big difficulty but you are not going to be able to solve all of that possibly in one chunk so you have to break that down, where do we start small steps ... I think small steps building up um, well that's the one purpose of an IEP to support the child ... it's also used obviously if you think that the child has got a major problem to show to the authorities that you are identifying the problem and doing what you can so that at a later date you can say that we have done this but now it is beyond our means

T- so it is a form of evidence as well ?

B- yes.

T- so when you set about writing an IEP and you have identified the problem ... I think hat you are saying, tell me if I am wrong is that you put together a programme of steps

B- yes.

T- ... to help that child

B- yes ..

T- ... to return to where the other children are ... would that be right ?

B- um you may, I mean for some children you may hopefully they will catch up and be where their peers are ... some children you may feel that they just need to be supported full stop ... for whatever reason you may feel this year or this term they are going to make some progress but it's not going to get them to where you perceive that they should be so I think that it differs for different children.

T- so it is to move towards

B- yes, to move them on.

T- when you have put together your IEP is it ... how do you work it in terms of the children ... because they have certain amounts of time don't they So how do you set about planning when they are going to have the time or how you are going to fit it into your classroom ?

B- I just first of all see who is going to be in the class ... what the support staff are and what time they've got and basically I look at what we plan to do with that child and then put that work into be done .. either my time is free, it might be the first thing in the morning if the rest of the class are doing look, cover, spell, check I might hear that child ... perhaps if he's got .. you know, do the first 5 McNally words ... grab them and do them then ... um ... you can't do it in a big chunk, it is impossible it's literally a matter of taking small bits of work when you have got the support to do that.

T- so is it often different work from the work that the other children are doing ?

B- sometimes it is different and sometimes it is just differentiated work ... sometimes they are not even taken out of the class at the moment there is somebody who comes in to support, well initially that person was just coming in to help me set up Literacy Hour ... well she now supports two IEPs and what ... sometimes she takes the children out to work because it is not the same as we are doing or a little bit different but if it is sometimes like writing she will just encourage them and support them ... it just depends how the timetable is, how it fits in and how much time you have got to give for that activity.

T- do the IEPs ever affect the way that you teach the whole class ?

B- no.

T- so the children follow

B- no wait a moment, they have done. Last year I was in a class where there were 8 IEPs running and they were nearly all the same sort of IEP - all learning initial sounds. So ... well, while the rest of the class were doing look, cover, spell, check ... that sort of activity ... the whole group, I would work with the whole group doing our phonics and stuff like that. So yes it has, but it wouldn't change the overall timetable as such.

T- so it was just that they all had the same needs if their needs were different

B- then it would just be a matter of fitting it all in ... yes. I don't change the timetable to try and fit it in and if it looks like a group of children were going to work in class and the rest were doing something else they would probably go ... they would probably be removed .. as they will often be distracted or the other children say why are they doing that ...

T- is that the main reason why you ask for children to be withdrawn ..

B- yes .

T- because they are doing different work and they might be distracted ?

B- yes, but it's not I try not to do that very often. If I am teaching the whole class and I feel what I am teaching the whole class is going to be difficult ... like this work I am doing with E. (Emmanuel - Stage 5) a lot of what I am doing with the whole class is almost irrelevant. He picks up on some things but he needs to be taken off and the same information given to him in a different way. I can't do two lessons - I haven't got the time to do that.

T- but he has a virtually full time integration assistant

B- yes.

T- who do you think that the IEP is written for ? When you are writing it who are you writing it for ?

B- well hopefully it's for the child, but at the same time it does help you to plan what that child's needs are and for if you have got an integration assistant they need to pick up that as well.

T- you say it is for the child

B- initially it is for the child for identifying the difficulties and the best way of helping them and breaking that down into simple straightforward activities. It also helps the teacher to be aware of how you are building up what you are working towards and how to plan it in.

T- who would you normally involve in planning the IEP ?

B- um

T- do you write it yourself or

B- I have done recently, yes - I have written to myself .um ... with the support of the SENCO as well and also in one particular case I have also referred to the integration assistant. I discuss with the SENCO what type of activities we should be doing and then I have written down the activities and had that sort of confirmed and then spoken with the integration assistant ... you know, how shall we do it ... and she has a copy and often plans her own stuff and work as well to do with that.

T- so it is school based staff ?

B- yes.

T- would you involve the parents ?

B- I usually talk to the parents at parents evening about like they are informed that their child has now got a need and what we are doing ... and is that OK with them ...

T- so it a sort of information and getting their consent ?

B- yes, and explaining where we thought the child's difficulty was ... often they have thought that themselves ... and I haven't known a parent who said that they have not wanted that support. I think that a lot of parents are a bit wary about their child being labelled if they have got an IEP or that they are being taken out of class, is my child being made to feel different once they have been reassured that this is to help them move on rather than to make them feel different it isn't a problem.

T- and would you involve the child themselves ?

B- I haven't done, but I can see no ... I think if the child was aware, there are one or two children in the class who are very aware that he has got a problem ... um ... but they are quite young in here. I mean there is no reason why you couldn't say well you seem to have a bit of a problem with your letter formation and Miss so and so will help you. I can see the reason for that I'm not sure .. I've never done it to actually say do you think we should But yes I do tell the child well you seem a bit stuck here and we need to sort this out but it is no more than that really.

This marked the end of the first part of the interview.

T- so what I thought that we could do to start thinking about Natelle's strengths and weaknesses is just to run through this board game. It is just a list of things that children do in school .. because when I was thinking about this I thought that it was quite hard to think of all the different things that they do ... so....

B- so you want me to sort these out

T- yes, into things that Natelle finds difficult at school, things that you think that she finds easy at school and if it is just OK or you are not sure pop it in the middle. So you are looking for things she really finds quite difficult.

B- do you want me to do that first ?

T- well, no just as you do them ... it is up to you really how you do them

(B. sorts cards quickly and easily. She is sure of her choices).

T- OK so the ones that you think that Natelle finds difficult are being quiet in class, being good in class, sharing with others (at this point somebody walked into the classroom. They immediately left), working with other children, helping others, maths and playing in the playground. And the things that you think that she finds easy at school are asking for help, reading, writing and finding out things.

B- yes.

T- OK. Do you think that I have missed anything out ? That you would want to put in the difficult or the easy ?

B- um she finds it difficult friendships she finds difficult hard to organise friendships....

T- OK.

B- basically how to get people to be her friend.

T- right, because a lot of these are based around that aren't they (showing card in difficult pile) ?

B- yes. She gets very upset if she can't be someone's best friend. She has to be top dog, you might say.

T- is that where most of her difficulties in the classroom come from ?

B- yes. Well, it is one of her major areas, yes.

T- and her maths as well

B- that is the academic area that she um struggles with. The rest ... academically she is OK. If all of these (behaviour cards) weren't disturbing her she would be fine.

T- right, why do you think that she finds these so difficult ?

B- um ... things like being quiet in class and being so-called "good" in class is difficult for her because she always wants she just speaks out .. she just has to and if you say not now or it's not your turn she will continue determined ... it is like attention seeking. I mean, she often has valuable things to say but being quiet in class is difficult. On the carpet she can't

take her turn easily, she can't put her hand up, she shouts. And I think that she does understand, she ought to understand the rules because she is a bright enough girl. Being good in class ... again it is down to wanting to have the last word and she has her own agenda in her head sometimes and she is locked in to these things (both laugh knowingly) she can't get over them.

T- so if she wants to tell you something she will keep going until she has told it

B- even though I might be talking .. or somebody else might be talking or whatever and it might not be related and she will suddenly pipe up with something. Um she can share with others, work with others, help others but there is always ... um ... she is desperate to be in charge, she is desperate to be in control. If she is a class helper on Monday taking the register back she can't understand why someone else has a turn on Tuesday. So sharing ... sharing ... she has to ... she will share but she has to have the rubbers and the pencils ... so control, control. So working with other children they, of course, get fed up with her, complain about her and then she gets upset. She thinks that they don't like her any more.

T- and that is when she

B- starts crying. Sometimes she starts poking and she is physically aggressive with the other children. And that sort of issue comes over in the playground. If she is friendly with a group, usually girls, they have to play what she wants to play and if they doesn't happen she can't just relinquish control and join in ... she either gets aggressive or gets upset. And maths is just the academic area ... she is not poor at it but it is her weakest area.

T- OK. Is there any reason why she is particularly poor at it ?

B- a lot of the time it is that maybe she is not concentrating not always, because she is actually quite good at concentrating. Again you can put it down to using things calculators or if we have things out

T- yes, I suppose with maths there is a lot of apparatus isn't there ?

B- yes, she is just all over the place with it and again it is that control factor again and that not being able to share.

T- so are these things on her IEP ?

B- yes ... being good ... her IEP is based on her behaviour. Not as specific as helping and sharing but the idea is to get her to sit and to listen and to understand that good behaviour gets a reward.

T- so, would you say that Natelle would say that these are the things that she finds difficult as well ?

B- um I think that she would probably say that she can share (this was clearly an issue that had not been thought about from the tone of voice and the look of surprise) That she can help ... because she does. I don't think that she would recognise that she does it with conditions (more confident in tone now). She always asks about being good in class. Have I been good today ? She is desperate, you know, and I am quite frank with her these days and say well I am sorry Natelle you were some of the time but remember blah blah blah and she can be ... she can be ... she would say that she can be quiet in class but she just sees that when she has something to say she has the right to say it. And when she has said it she will be quiet. She can't understand it is basically social skills. She can't understand that all these things are fine, she can do them but timing is

T- and do you think that she would recognise that the maths as her weaker ...

B- yes, she gets upset if she can't keep up with, let's say, Sarita. Why has Sarita got a star ? because she has finished all her work, come on if you get yours finished ... yes, I think that she would recognise that.

T- right ... so does she get additional help with these things ?

B- she does but mainly for Natelle ... her ... i think her IEP is based mainly on social skills learning to be good so, yes, she does get help with sort of chat about what I expect at the start of the day and I speak with mum at the end of the day. And, of course, we just go with what happens. Additional support in the class can be helpful but what she does do, if she has a good day, like yesterday, we had quite a good day Natelle and I she then goes completely the other way and she sits next to you and clings onto you (both laugh) with her head on your lap and she is stroking your leg or she wants to kiss you or she is sitting in a big sulk with her because I haven't chosen her to take the register back. So emotionally she swings

T- it's quite extreme isn't it ?

B- yes. She is very up and down.

T- you said that you tell mum at the end of the day ...

B- yes, if I see mum.

T- is that your main time of contact ?

B- yes. Mum tends to lead her into classroom. She is rarely here before the bell goes, usually the bell goes and Natelle filters in ... she is not a late child but I haven't really got the time to speak to mum in the morning. Mum is rushing off as well I think.

T- and does mum come to Parent's Evening and

B- the last time it was Natelle's step-dad who came. But, yes, it is mum or dad who do come to Parent's Evenings.

T- and do you find that a useful time ?

B- yes, I do. I was quite interested the last time because we both agreed on the things that we thought were the issues .. *with the step-dad ... we both recognised we both had the same ...* we agreed on how we found Natelle. Um ... so that was good. I don't know what goes on at home and Natelle is obsessed with being good. But ... she just wants those words to be said (both laugh - she asks anyone and everyone around school).

T- so if you said yes, you have been good, she would be happy.

B- she would be happy but

T- but she wouldn't necessarily good.

B- no.

T- OK . Do you think that mum, or step-dad, are happy with the contact that they have with school ?

B- I think so, yes. They haven't said otherwise. And mum is very keen to know how Natelle is getting on and is supportive ... unfortunately more of the time she appears to be more supportive over the times when Natelle has been naughty and carrying out sanctions. And when I say well, she has had a good day today she just says oh, that's good ... there is no ... like with Andre's mum there is a big hug and a kiss Natelle's is just relieved that she has been good. But if she has been naughty, if there is an issue that I have had to tell mum about, then it is like no crisps or no this or no that. So I feel sanctions are ... weigh heavier with her ... I have tried to encourage mum ... I have got the book of excellence and she gets a stamp if she has been good but she doesn't really ask to see that, I have to present that. She is not very interested. She just wants to know has Natelle been good and if she hasn't what has she done wrong.

T- so it is quite difficult to have a relationship other than where you sound a bit like you are complaining

B- yes.

T- because mum doesn't listen

B- mum is very nice and very supportive and is very interested in Natelle's behaviour but she is only really concerned when Natelle is naughty. And she doesn't do such horrendous things for that to be the main issue but she is not that interested in how good Natelle was ... has she been good today ? or often it is has she been naughty, you know ?

T- yes is that the thing that you mainly talk about at the parent's evenings as well ?

B- well, I have only had one Parent's Evening oh no, step-dad wanted to know how she was getting on with her reading um

T- so it went a bit wider

B- yes, and he seemed quite pleased ... at that point she had settled in quite nicely.

T- do you think that you have a different relationship with Natelle's mum and step-dad with her being special needs compared to if she wasn't ? Do you think that there is a different type of relationship ?

B- I think maybe mum wouldn't be so anxious. Possibly mum wouldn't stop at the end of the day. I don't know ... because mum stops because she obviously wants to pick up on any issues. I don't know ... I don't think mum would give that time .. I think Natelle would go ... you know, there is mummy and off you go.

T- do you think that it makes any difference to how well you have got to know Natelle's mum, step-dad ... or the way that you talk to them ?

B- it's quite similar because Natelle's issues are never such major um ... they are not serious behaviour problems, they are just drip, drip , drip and we need to find some way round to make Natelle Natelle doesn't seem to be a happy little girl she is desperate for approval and credit and she is desperate ... and her actions are niggling, unhelpful things really rather than major ... yes. So, no, I think I speak to Natelle's mum like I would with anybody really.

T- and Natelle doesn't work with any other member of support staff ...

B- no, her IEP is not that detailed.

T- OK. Thanks. Is there anything that you would like to add ?

B- that I think that Natelle's issues are I think that they are difficult to crack in some ways because of her extreme response. If you do go for the improving your self-esteem and making her feel useful and wanted she becomes desperately clingy. I find that a bit worrying, her emotional state to the point where if I want to talk to another child she gets very upset ... she is desperate to be special to somebody

T- why do you think that she is like that ?

B- that, I think, along with her desperation to be in control she is a little control freak given half a chance somewhere, and I am assuming at home, there must be a very tight rein kept on her. I get the impression that she is a child that is not a child that is lacking for anything I get the feeling that she is , you know, well regimented and so she comes to

school and she is desperate to have control and desperate to let off steam in a way. I mean, Andre was a bit like that, he would go from being very clingy to he is balancing out a bit more now whereas poor old Natelle ... sometimes she seems so unhappy

T- so they are looking for the perfect

B- I get the impression ... the impression I get, and I can't really base it on anything, any evidence but the impression that I get is that has to look nice and produce nice academic work and to be seen and not heard basically ... be a nice little girl be a nice, good little girl and , of course, she is an ordinary little child and she is not always good (laughs - at this point the tone of voice has become one of fondness).

T- like every little child.

B- yes, that is right. But I get that impression. I get that impression.

T- right. Has mum or step-dad ever talked about, have they ever tried to explain why Natelle is like she is ?

B- they just step-dad they both have said, oh, she is like this at home and we will soon put a stop to that. It comes across as sort of, you know, as sensible parents, but I don't know how they stop it. I don't think that there is any aggression but there are a lot of things .. like she is not allowed to have crisps at morning break because she is naughty. There are a lot of sanctions, which i think oh, you know. And she is desperate ... that upsets her because she wants to be like her peer group ... they have crisps and she wants her mum to go and buy her crisps and this has led to her recently getting money from other children and she has also taken money and myself and Mr. Leach have both explained to her that it is not my money, that I look after it and she comes and asks, have you got any spare money for me ? She sounds like an underfed, under privileged child, you know ...please ... but she's not and I have explained this to mum and said is it possible that she could have crisps or money because she just wants to be like the others at break. But mum is adamant and said no.

T- so you are saying she is getting worse and worse ...

B- she is desperate, yes.

T- and the sanctions are getting more ...

B- yes, I have said to um is there any other way that we could work around it, because at school it is causing a problem because she wants to be like other children with their bag of crisps or their ten pence or whatever. But mum has said no until she is good. And I can't say to mum what do you call good at home ? And I thought about having crisps myself and using them as a reward mechanism for her but that looks like I am taking over ... mum said no

crisps so I can't give Natelle crisps. But I am sure that if she had crisps it would eliminate an awful lot ... some of these difficulties that she has at playtimes. And she spends a lot of the time in tears.

T- is that what she is often crying about

B- yes, she hasn't had her crisps, or she doesn't want to go out ...

T- yes, she hangs around the door doesn't she ?

B- yes, this is what she does ... she gets locked into obsessions and she tries to find a way to make me ... she has asked me to talk to her mum to let her have crisps and I have said that I have talked to mummy and she said no and that is up to mummy.

T- so she does the pity factor first

B- oh, she does that and then she tries to get them off somebody else. By hook or by crook ... she is a determined child .. but unfortunately it is all being done in a negative way. She hasn't quite twigged that if she gives a bit of leeway to mum maybe at home and then she might get her crisps and that would be one of her problems solved ... she is very determined ... so ...

T- so you are saying that the way that mum's dealing with what she thinks is right in school is making it worse ...

B- yes, like a good telling off from mum and being sent tot her room ... like with Andre he was banned from watching the cartoons whatever great, because he could do with reading his reading book but he comes to school ... he doesn't feel left out whereas Natelle feels different ... which is a sad thing ...

T- it's a difficult think to break out of ...

B- yes ...

T- because if mum is not willing to bend and Natelle is not willing to bend

B- um, mum was stern with me about it so I have left it. And I know that Chris is going to have a word about it because he has had to pick Natelle up a couple of times. I mean, she is trying to steal money and she does not understand that she can't do it . So she is obviously in a bit of an emotional state (both laugh) and it's a shame ... it is a shame. But on her positive side, she can be lovely.

T- thank you.

B- you're welcome.

NOTE: the last passage is interesting. Mum says that she punishes Natelle because that is what the school wants. The miscommunication on both sides has led to a conflict situation

where one sees the other as to blame. Meanwhile Natelle is just getting deeper and deeper. Particularly on the school side there appears to be a judgement made rather than trying to understand the situation from mum's point of view. Natelle could have crisps, if mum didn't feel that the school wants her to punish Natelle by the withdrawal of a reward, as a reward to what mum sees as picking on small things and making too much of them. In effect mum is being blamed for her child being naughty and if she does what she thinks the school wants her to do she is seen as being part of the problem rather than trying to help. Communication breaks down and barriers go up.

Appendix 4 - Guide sheet used as basis of interviews with children.

Section 1 - what the children feel they are good \ not so good at.

To start us off I am going to read out a lot of things that you do at school. I want you to tell me whether you find them easy or whether you find them difficult.

Writing, reading, doing maths (sums), spelling, science, being good in class, listening to the teacher, helping others, singing, and painting.

List for the child what they have said that they do well and then not so well.

Out of all those things what do you like doing the best ? Can you tell me why ?

If is favourite rather than best subject then ask which they are best at and why.

What is the worst one ? Can you tell me why ?

If they just don't like the subject try to probe what it is that they find the most difficult as well.

Section 2 - strategies to mitigate difficulties.

Ok, you find difficult. Can you tell me what you do when you get stuck.

(offer practical examples as a prompt if necessary)

Aim towards a list of strategies that they use.

Do you think that the teacher knows that you find this very difficult ?

How do you think they know this ?

What do you think that they do to try and help you ?

With all of the things that you do to help you who thought of those things ?

How do you think that the teachers could help you more ?

What could they do to help ?

Do you think your parents (caregivers) know what you are finding difficult in school ?

how do they know ?

Appendix 5 - Guide sheet used as basis of interviews with parents.

Background.

Were you born in this country ? Were your parents ?

(If went to UK school) - Did you enjoy school ? What did you particularly enjoy ? What did you dislike ? How do you feel that you were treated at school ?

Your child.

I have lots of cards of things that children do at school - some are about the work they do and others are about how they get on with others at school. I would like you to sort them into things that you think they would find difficult, things that they would find easy, and any which they would find OK.

Writing, reading, doing maths (sums), spelling, science, being good in class, listening to the teacher, helping others, spelling words, working with the other children, playing in the playground, keeping my temper, making things and singing.

Out of the easier ones which would you say that they find easiest of all ? Can you think of any reasons for this ?

Out of the more difficult group which ones do you think they find most difficult (there can be more than one) ? Why do you think they find these especially difficult ?

Your child at school.

Has the school told you of any strengths that your child has ? Anything that they find difficult ?

How did you find out about these ? Who told you ?

What do you feel about the way that the school tells you about how your child is doing at school (do you understand, are you told enough, would you like to be told in other ways ?)

Your involvement.

Does the school know about how you feel about your child ? How ?

Are you involved in any way in helping your child overcome the things that they find difficult ?

How did you become involved ?

How would you like to be involved ?

Do you think that your child will stop finding these things difficult one day ?

School knowledge.

Can you tell me what your child is taught at school ?

Can you tell me how they are taught ? (for example, are all the class taught the same thing, are they all taught with the teacher stood at the front, are they taught in groups).

Appendix 6 - Guide sheet used as basis of interviews with teachers and support staff.

Background.

Ask about level of training - if not known already.

What does the term "special needs" mean to you ?

(if they give a list of needs then explore - what they mean \ more or less common \ possible causes of needs etc.)

How would you decide whether a child has a special need ?

What does the term IEP mean to you - purpose ?

(if they talk about setting up IEPs explore in general terms)

The child.

I have lots of cards of things that children do at school - some are about the work they do and others are about how they get on with others at school. I would like you to sort them into things that you think they would find difficult, things that they would find easy, and any which they would find OK.

Writing, reading, doing maths (sums), spelling, science, being good in class, listening to the teacher, helping others, spelling words, working with the other children, playing in the playground, keeping my temper, making things and singing.

Out of the easier ones which would you say that they find easiest of all ? Can you think of any reasons for this ?

Out of the more difficult group which ones do you think they find most difficult (there can be more than one) ? Why do you think they find these especially difficult ?

Involvement

Explore how involve parents and child - level of involvement and approach to involving.

Explore also - type of contact \ explanation to parents or child \ use of IEP in involvement process \ quality of relationship \ target setting \ parental and child knowledge of needs, SEN system and how school operates.

Encourage teacher etc. to explore additional areas as they come up or ask if I have missed anything out or there is anything they wish to add.